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# THE DERELICT

CUTCLIFFE HYNE



London, England



Dr. Francis P. Maser

Buffalo. March 5<sup>th</sup>

1902



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THE ~ ~  
**DERELICT**

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE



LEWIS, SCRIBNER & CO.  
NEW YORK & LONDON  
1901

George P. Mason  
Buffalo. March 5<sup>th</sup>  
1902

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Dr. Francis P. Mason  
Buffalo. March 5<sup>th</sup>  
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# THE DERELICT

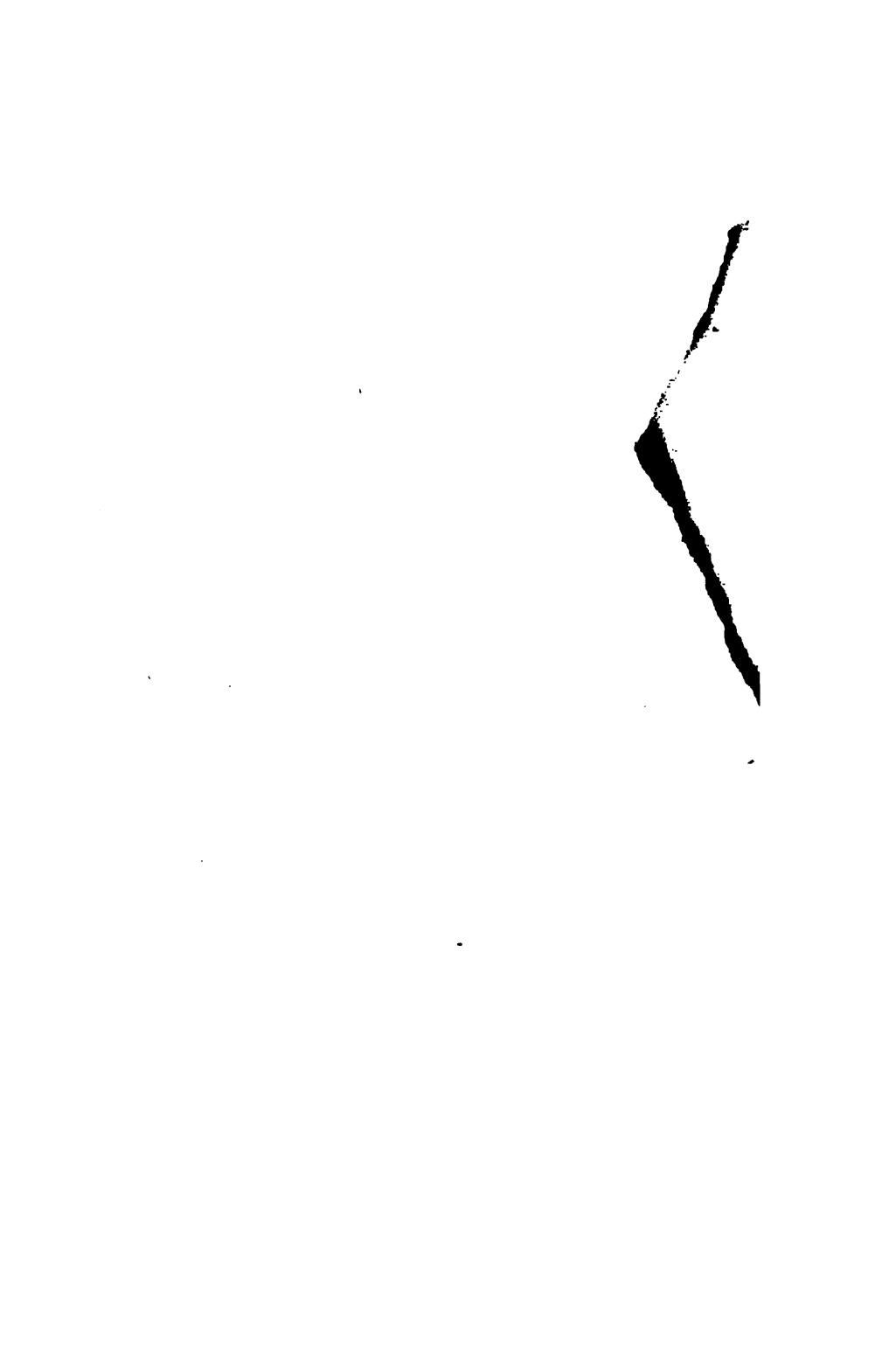
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Charles John  
By CUTCLIFFE HYNE



LEWIS, SCRIBNER & CO.  
NEW YORK AND  
LONDON 1901



# **The Derelict.**



# The Derelict.

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## CHAPTER I.

“You are my skipper now,” said Mr. Horrocks, “and I’ve got to call you ‘sir.’”

“Of course, you must when we’re on board here,” said Clayton, the new captain of the “Ambleside.” “Discipline’s discipline, and neither you nor I, Purser, are big enough to override it. But I don’t know that we shall be any the worse friends for that. True, when we were on the old ‘Birmingham,’ you as Purser and I as chief mate, our relative positions were somewhat different, but now even if I have taken a step above you, we can still be friends.”

The Purser laughed. “I don’t see why not,” he said. “The billet was a long time coming to you, but that shouldn’t make you uppish.”

Clayton shook his head.

“No, indeed,” he replied, then after a pause, he added: “Horrocks, if you only knew how I have longed to find myself in command of a big liner, I believe even you’d be astonished. A chief officer’s nobody, even if he is R. N. R.; a Captain’s somebody; and I’ve had that drilled into me every hour I’ve

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been ashore since I was married. And, of course, there's increase of pay."

"Well," said the stout Purser drily, "I hope the berth comes up to your expectations. You've no watch to keep like you had when you were chief officer, but you'll find yourself voluntarily keeping both watches out of sheer nervousness. You'd no truck with passengers before, but you'll see presently what a joy and a blessing they can be when they are in the mood. A passenger who gave me a tract when he boarded the boat has been at me already about you.

"He said, did I think it safe to cross with a Captain who'd never commanded the boat before? Would you know the road? If you failed to find New York Harbor, would you at least strike Boston? He didn't want to be dumped down in St. Johns, as he'd heard was often the habit of new and inexperienced captains, because Newfoundland was foggy, and the smell of fish made him ill. And did I think you'd keep the engines from breaking down? He'd heard that young captains were very careless about engines; they left too much to the engineers."

"You'd better tell the old chief that."

"I did, but he seemed to see nothing funny in it. I said I was going to bring that passenger down to call on him in the engine-room, and leave a few tracts. He said if I did, he'd set on a greaser to tip a can of

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warm oil over him and spoil his clothes. And in the meanwhile he gave me a lecture on the inefficiencies of the mess-room steward. I'm afraid there's varra sma' sense o' humor about McDraw."

"They say he's the most careful engineer in the Western Ocean trade," said Clayton, with a sigh, "and that's principally what I care about. He won't press engines much, and so he's missed a lot of promotion, and was passed over for the newer boats, but he's never had a breakdown yet, and won't if grandmothering his engines will do it."

"Well, that's a comforting thing for you to go upon as a groundwork, anyway."

"I want all the backing up I can get now, Purser. I'm never going to return to what I was. And if anything happens to the boat—well, I'm not going back to shore to get sacked. You know what I mean."

"Pooh," said the stout man. "'All saved except the Skipper, who went down on the bridge,' is melodramatic and out of fashion. Our company isn't one of those mean Jew companies that just run tramps, and blacklist a skipper if a Dago pilot scrapes her over a sandbar. They stick by you honestly enough if you come foul of an accident just by luck, and not through any glaring fault of your own."

Captain Clayton laughed. "I've a sort of memory that you got Irishman's promotion for a bit of a mis-

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take just recently. You used to be on the 'Birmingham,' which was the best they'd got. And now you're with me on the 'Ambleside,' which is the smallest boat on the line, and—well, I'm a lucky man to get such a right good purser."

"Thanks. You keep the old packet going nicely, with the blue ensign wagging out behind her, and I'll see she's popular and comfortable inside, and we'll soon work up the line to the 'Birmingham' again, yes, and past her. I'm a man that's made it my business to be liked by passengers, and they'll come to whatever ship I'm on whenever they want to cross. You must do the same, sir. That's the way for us to get on in this trade, always supposing we handle the press ashore correctly."

The Doctor came in then, and they went round the ship for inspection, and, when that was over, Mr. Horrocks thought he would go and cheer them up in the smoke-room a bit, and let those that did not know it quite understand what lucky people they were to be on board of the "Ambleside." But on the way there, the tract man once more waylaid him.

"Oh, Purser," said he, "did you read that booklet I gave you yesterday?"

"Haven't had a chance yet, Mr. Steinberg. And, besides, I lent it for the time being to the chief engineer, and he hasn't returned it."

"Ah," said he, and brought another from his

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pocket. "Then read that in the meantime. You'll find it will give you inward comfort. Oh, and wait a minute before you go. There's another point I want to ask your advice upon. I see by the route chart you supply, that the steam-lane we're on now differs from the homeward track."

"Well, Mr. Steinberg, I'm no navigator, but I believe that that's a bed-rock fact. The homeward route's about twenty or thirty miles away from where we are now."

"That's rather a long distance, isn't it?"—he tapped the Purser's arm confidentially—"but I must tell you that I am a strong swimmer, and it is my intention to take one of the life-belts from my stateroom when I make the attempt."

"Thoughtful of you."

"Of course, if there is anything extra to pay for the life-belt, Purser, I should be pleased to settle it with you now."

Mr. Horrocks was beginning to think that Steinberg was one of those people who can do with a bit of care. "Not at all, my dear sir. The fees for life-belts are always the perquisite of your bedroom steward. Pay him before you start on your swim. When do you think of leaving us?"

The man looked at the Purser sharply. Mr. Horrocks bit the end of a cigar, and blew through it carefully. "Got a match?" he asked.

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"No," said Steinberg, and dropped his suspicion. "When do I think of leaving this boat? Well, that I can't tell you. But I've got a notion in my mind that she isn't safe, and I want to swim off to one of the homegoing boats, and get back to England again. I've spoken about it to Levison. He says it's quite the proper thing to do. You see, I'm a life-governor of the Porter Mines, and it's due to myself that I should take care of myself."

"You are acting most naturally," said the Purser, and made a mental note that Mr. Steinberg should be watched with remarkable accuracy.

The intending suicide on Atlantic liners is a much more common personage than the general public suppose. The sea and its mystery have the effect of developing the latent madness in some folks into active mischief, and many a man who is sane enough, and entirely capable ashore, becomes on shipboard a wholly irresponsible maniac.

As it is practically impossible to guarantee that nobody shall jump overboard unless you keep the whole passenger list in irons, steamer officers are apt to take suicides as they come, and confine their energies to keeping details out of the papers as far as may be. But if they do gather a hint that a passenger is contemplating a jump over the side, they tell off men to watch him even at the risk of overworking several already fully-strained departments.

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Steinberg tapped the Purser's arm confidentially.  
"Oh, I say, Mr. Horrocks, you won't mention what  
I've told you to the other passengers?"

"No, sir."

"Because, you see, if I gave a lead, they'd guess the  
reason, and all be trooping after me, and the other  
steamer we swam to might make a difficulty about  
taking in so large a crowd."

"Great Washington! what a head you must have to  
think out all these details! Now, myself I should  
never have foreseen a complication like that."

He sniggered. "Well, to tell the truth, I oughtn't  
to claim all the credit. It was Levison's idea. Levi-  
son said: 'Look here, old man, go off on your swim if  
you think it advisable, but don't talk too much about  
it, or else the ship people will stop you.' 'Why should  
they?' said I. 'Why, don't you see, if you give a lead,  
all the other passengers would want to follow, and  
then the Captain would stop the lot of you? It  
would never do for him to go into New York with no  
passengers at all. It would ruin his credit.' "

"Cute man, Levison."

"Yes, isn't he?"

"Levison coming with you?"

"Oh, no. You see, he suffers from cold feet, and  
he thinks a twenty-mile swim might give him a  
chill."

"It would. But say—is Levison some relative or

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partner of yours? Is he sort of companioning you anyway?"

"Well, you know, not officially. But he's very anxious about me because I'm a life-governor of the Porter Mines, and so, of course, I've got to be taken care of. They're very much sought-after things, those life-governorships."

"Shouldn't wonder. Levison in that line of business at all?"

Mr. Steinberg drew himself up. "Rather not. He's merely a director, and that's a very different thing. He'll not be made a governor till there's another vacancy, and that's not likely to happen during his time. All the present life-governors of the Porter Mines are younger and more healthy men than Levison. He eats too much. I'm always telling him so. And, besides, he will drink champagne."

"You don't?"

"Always stick to port and lithia water, mixed half and half. You get all the fun of the port and none of the gout."

"Look here, Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser, wagging a thick finger at him, "you're a man of ideas, and I want to steal some of them. Where do you sit in the saloon? Oh, I remember; down at the end of the Doc's table. Well, will you do me a big favor and shift and I'll find you a seat at mine?"

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"Purser," said he, rubbing his hands, "you honor me. I shall be delighted."

Mr. Horrocks left him there, slipped round some of the houses till he was out of sight, and gave the deck steward and quartermaster strict orders to keep an eye on the man and see he did not get over the side. And then he went down below and sent about a few other instructions that might be conducive to Mr. Steinberg's health and welfare.

A Purser like Mr. Horrocks does not have a lunatic next him at meals from choice, but it appeared to him that this one had got to be looked after. It came to his memory that the Porter Mines were a remarkably big concern, and if one of their life-governors got into the water off the "Ambleside," there would be a nasty splash ashore, as well as in the Atlantic.

Such little episodes are apt to reflect discredit upon a steamship line, and directors are not in the habit of favoring pursers who are so unfortunate as to lose passengers under such circumstances. It therefore behooved him to exercise care in the present instance, not only for the passenger's sake but for his own as well.

It was not for himself as Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, that he feared. As that official, his wants were small, and his private income covered them easily. But he was a man with an alias; a man who led a double existence. Throughout all his life he had carried an

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infinite tenderness for those wretched children of the slums in which Liverpool is so prolific, and of late he had contrived to found an Institution in a village near Chester for their maintenance and relief. It pleased him to pose as a portly local philanthropist. Down there he was Mr. Rocks, of Rocks' Orphanage, a somewhat pompous personage, who was very different from the affable Purser in the Town S.S. Co.'s employ.

It was lest the power to continue being Mr. Rocks should be taken away from him, that he was so anxious.

So he thought it useful to have Mr. Steinberg near him so as to be kept posted up in his latest views; and also, it was beginning to dawn on him, that Levison's conversation was bad for his morals. He could not quite decide whether persuading a cheerful lunatic to drown himself was actual murder, but considered that anyway it was something uncommonly near it, and stood by to trample on Mr. Levison's toes in a way that would have made that diplomatist nervous if only he could have known it.

They were mostly old travelers at the Purser's table, as was only natural, and knowing that they would soon guess what was up if he did not tell them, he affected the confidential, and let them know the delicate state of Steinberg's health, and so persuaded them all to bear a hand.

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The Doctor got to hear about it from one of these, and came to Mr. Horrocks, and said he supposed he'd better take over Steinberg into his own charge, rather hinting that the Purser might find him above his capacity to deal with.

There was a smouldering enmity between Mr. Horrocks and Dr. O'Neill, and as the Purser detected in this proposal a scheme on the Doctor's part to make fees out of a profitable patient, he replied curtly enough that he felt himself quite competent to manage this dangerous passenger.

The men at the Purser's table entered into the spirit of the thing with zest. They were busy commercial men, all of them, who did, perhaps, their six crossings a year, and to whom an Atlantic voyage was holiday and time for relaxation. So they were quite open for a frolic.

But at the same time, the talk as a whole tended towards the gruesome. Steinberg, it seemed, had made a study from his youth up of the literature of Atlantic disaster, and as the others were willing to humor him they had the full history of all the accidents which actually had happened, which might have happened, and which could not possibly have happened since ever the seas were first poured out. They had some fine active liars amongst them at the Purser's table, and they competed for the palm with spirit.

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“Yes, but look here,” Steinberg would begin every now and again, “with inexperienced Captains like \_\_\_\_\_.”

And then Mr. Horrocks would say “S-s-sh!” and the table would cough, and Steinberg would collect himself, and wink at the Purser, and go on pleasantly. He only wanted a little humoring to keep him straight, and when someone suggested that it was cruel of the Purser to play with the fellow’s infirmity, he bade the objector look at the other alternative. “I might have locked him up in his room, and then we’d have had a howling, scrabbling lunatic disturbing half the ship, and he would probably have ended up by choking himself painfully to death with the soap. Sounds a bit unlikely, doesn’t it? But I knew that soap trick actually done once by a Third Class, and saw the beggar when he was stiff, and I can tell you he wasn’t pleasant to look at.”

But with all the badinage, there was one thing the diners at the Purser’s table were quite solid on, and that was the strength of modern ships, and the “Ambleside” in particular. Short of trying to hit the Tuskar Rock out of the water, or having them rammed fairly on the broadside, you could not sink them they said.

“Remember how the ‘What’s-her-name’ went ker-smash full speed into that iceberg?” said Van Sciach. “Lost a few feet off her bows, and a man that I know

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that was in the smoking-room got a poker hand so mixed up by the shock that he showed four queens, and won the biggest jack-pot of the voyage. But there was no serious damage done, except that she steamed into a port a day late, and the company had to stand another three meals gratis."

"Iceberg's nothing," said Bisbee. "Remember the Blue Cross boat working in for her wharf the other day in the East River? She'd a bit too much way on, and didn't answer her helm quick enough, and she sliced off the corner of that quay as though it was so much margarine. Did she sink? No, sir. Didn't crumple a plate. Scarcely so much as scratched her paint. 'N't that so, Horrocks?"

"Gospel," said the Purser. "The Lord help anything that gets in front of one of these packets when she's got a move on her."

"Yes, that's all right," said Steinberg, "but you've all missed out the thing that's going to make the biggest steamer smash of this century. How about an old wooden timber-ship, packed with lumber, dismasted, and lying square across your track, and just awash? Given it was an ordinarily black night with no moon out to shine on her, no mortal look-out could see her till she was hit, and then that's the time where the steamer's big momentum the Purser was telling us about would come in. She couldn't cut through that loosely packed mass of wood same as

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she could through ice or a granite wall, and it would just rasp off half her bottom before it was done with her, and then she'd sink before the crew had time to fight for the boats."

"Skittles," said the Purser. "She'd cut through it like a box of matches."

Steinberg nodded his head. "So you say. But it's got to be proved. And it's my belief that the 'Ambleside' will test it." He leaned forward and wagged his finger solemnly at the table. "Do you know, I've dreamed every night since I've been on board that she would smash into a timber-laden derelict this trip, and that's why I've been so anxious to leave her."

"Why be in such a hurry?" asked the Purser. "You'll find it much more comfortable to go off in one of the life-boats when the time comes. If you'll say which boat you'll choose, I'll see she's stored with a few bottles of port and a case of lithia water."

"And it'll be a sight more sociable," said Van Sciach, "than cruising in the Atlantic by yourself."

"Ah, but you haven't foreseen," said Steinberg, "like I did in my dream, what a rush there'll be for those boats."

"Guess you dreamed wrong all the way there, sir. This packet isn't German, nor is she French." He turned and grinned at Mr. Horrocks. "You can tell that by the grub. But, on the other hand, pas-

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sengers hold an option on the life-boats. And if by chance they are wanted, Horrocks and the rest of the ship's company will see us all nicely tucked into the best, with a feeding-bottle and a clean pair of cuffs for each passenger, and then if they've time and there are boats left, they start fixing for themselves. But not before. That's American and English fashion, Mr. Steinberg, and don't you forget it. I guess it's pious thoughts like those that help down every meal that I have on these boats. Otherwise some of the grub might stick in my throat."

They switched off then to talk of food and accommodation on the Hamburg and Havre boats, and followed the general theory of the Western Ocean that those companies do treat their passengers considerably better than the English think needful. But Mr. Horrocks was not going to be drawn too much. "All right," he said, "go by the Germans if you like them best. But please remember that we contract to feed and carry you all the way across, and they only guarantee to do it as far as they go. And I guess they save by now and again only going half-way."

"Gentlemen," said Bisbee, "the Purser! May nothing ever choke him!" Which toast they all drank very pleasantly.

Then happened one of those strange coincidences

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which look so unlikely, but which life is so constantly yielding up.

“I dreamed last night—” Steinberg was beginning again, but what he dreamed they had to guess. Probably everybody who had been within earshot of his previous talk did guess too, and got a bad shock to the nerves. On a sudden, all the glass and silver and crockery shot along the tables of the saloon as though it was alive; the paint shelled off from the deck above and fell in little flickering clouds; and from the night outside, and from all through the ship, there came noise enough to supply a battle.

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### CHAPTER II.

FOR the moment the passengers were dazed, and made feeble grabs at their plates and glasses, or instinctively picked off the food that had fallen on to their clothes. But this was all the affair of a moment; and when that moment ended, there were screams, and yells, and shouts, and curses, and all the makings of a very ugly panic. All got out of their swivel chairs, and half of the people in the saloon commenced to rush for the companionways.

Now, at the first alarm, the Purser had instinctively turned his head, and was just in time to see Captain Clayton leave his chair as though the shock of the cascading dishes had shot him out, and disappear up the companion with the speed of the quick man in the pantomime. He had gone to take charge on deck, and Mr. Horrocks was left in command below. So the stout man strode smartly across, and got on the bottom step of the companion before the rush had fairly started, then put his hands in his pockets and cocked his big, good-humored head on one side and laughed. He was full in the glare of

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the electric lights, and all the passengers looked up and saw his portly figure, as he intended they should; and the rush broke and presently stopped. Then they began to ask questions.

“What’s happened?” “Is there any immediate danger?” “How long before we sink?” “Shall I go to my room and get some things together?” “Are they sending up rockets yet—the Captain ought to be made to, if he hasn’t.” “Will the stewards provision the boats, or ought we to put stuff in our pockets?”

“My dear good people,” said the Purser, “I’m sorry you’ve had a bit of a shock, but there’s not the smallest danger, believe me. If there had been I should have been told officially long before this. But as things are, I do wish you’d go back to the tables.”

“I want to go on deck first,” said someone.

“I daresay. And there you’d stay for half an hour watching the rain, and then come down again to finish your dinner and complain that it was bitterly cold. Now, please do consider my feelings. When passengers complain about their meals I’m the man who’s harrowed.”

There was a bit of a worried laugh at that, and a long lean Yankee drummer from the Doctor’s table backed up Mr. Horrocks capitally.

“Yes, that’s all very well, Purser, but you don’t simmer some of us down like that. I had a glass

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of claret flung over my nice clean shirt, and what I want to know is, will your company pay the laundry bill?"

There was another laugh at that, and the passengers began to settle back in their places.

"Sir, I'd like to have your answer," said the drummer.

"If you forward your application in writing, it will receive full consideration within the next ten years," said the Purser, and the passengers roared. It was poor enough wit, but their nerves were a bit raw just then, and anything tickled them. If the Purser could joke, surely the danger could not be great. Jennings, the chief steward, backed him up finely. He got his crew in hand again—they had been just as scared as everybody else—and they set about putting things shipshape on the tables.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Horrocks, "there have been a lot of bottles split, and the boat is fined for being careless. If you'd kindly give your orders to the stewards?"

Half-a-dozen voices shouted out the obvious retort. "Better simplify matters and serve out champagne all round. That's what we take just now if there's going to be free wine." They were getting their coolness back finely now.

Van Sciach rubbed the Purser's fat shoulder as he was going back to his place. "It's a bad smash,"

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he murmured, "isn't it? You can tell she's down by the head already. Look at the slant of the floor."

"I know no more than you. The Skipper will send if we're wanted. Don't let them talk about it here more than you can help."

"Oh, I'm not going to make a fool of myself," said Van Sciach.

Mr. Horrocks had given the wink to the chief steward to go and quieten down the Second Class passengers, and if the chief steward's methods were likely to be a trifle rough, well, so much the worse for the Second Class. The main thing was to keep them from stampeding. Anyway, if they complained ashore it would not matter seriously. Second Classes seldom amount to much, even with the newspaper men. As for the Thirds, well, any officer or quartermaster on deck would know enough to keep them from coming up till they were invited.

But the First saloon was the critical place from the Company's point of view, and the Purser knew he had his work cut out to keep them quiet, and at the same time pleased with themselves. But with his cool assurance, and his fine brazen affability, he shamed and humored them out of any tendency to panic.

Presently a quartermaster came, and stood for a moment at the foot of the companionway nursing his cap and fingering a scrap of paper.

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A steward was on to him in the instant. "The Purser, you want? He's there."

The fellow came across to Mr. Horrocks quickly enough. "The Captain sent this, sir."

Of course the saloon could not hear what he said; but it did not take much art to guess that the man had come down to deliver verdict as to whether the ship was to sink or swim, and they would have been more than human if they had stifled their curiosity. And as it was, the chatter snapped off as short as one might break a wine-glass stem.

It did not take the Purser long to read Clayton's scrawl.

*"That was a derelict we hit, and it played old Harry. We smashed clean through her, and it looks as if she's smashed off half our bottom. Keep the passengers quiet. I've got boats swung out ready. But I'm not going to let them leave her while there's a chance she can swim. It's life and death for me, this, so keep them quiet and down below."*

The note was not signed, and you may say it could have been more clearly put. But it told Mr. Horrocks what he was wanted to do, and he did it without another thought. Each of all that large mob of passengers was watching him with eyes that had a whole life behind them, and so there was no room for him to make a mistake. He knew words alone would not satisfy them. So he folded the paper

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and put it in his pocket-book, and delivered himself of a really good sigh of relief, right from the bottom of his ample waistcoat.

“Well, that’s all right,” he said. “There’s no big damage done. But you may thank your stars, ladies and gentlemen, you’re on a strong, well-found steamer, and have a Skipper like Captain Clayton. We’ve hit a derelict,” he explained, and told them what that was, and how the whole thing had occurred, spinning out the yarn purposely. “And there’s only one thing the Captain wants you to do,” he finished up, “and that is to let him and the crew have the deck to themselves to-night. The men are working at getting things shipshape again, and it’s a dark, rainy night, full of wind, and, if passengers were about outside, there’s a chance they might get injured. Now, I should suggest that we get up a scratch concert right here in the saloon, and, if the ladies don’t object, we’ll break through the usual rule, and make it a smoking concert.”

Steinberg, whom, to tell the truth, he had forgotten, tapped him on the arm.

“Purser,” he murmured, “you’ll excuse my staying, won’t you? I think I’d like to be off now. I’ll square up with my bedroom steward for that life-belt.”

“Why so much hurry?” said Mr. Horrocks. “There isn’t the least use in going just now.” He

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shut his eyes and pretended to work out a sum. "No, not the least use. The Blue Cross homeward boat is the only one in this neighborhood, and she isn't due for another eight hours yet. If you went off now you'd only have to wait about for her."

"Sure? You aren't humbugging me?"

"Mr. Steinberg," said the Purser stiffly, "it's my duty, as an officer of this boat, to give information to passengers when it's asked for. And I know my place too well to tell them anything that won't be of use to them."

"My dear Horrocks, believe me, I didn't mean to be in the least offensive."

"All right, then. Let's say no more about it."

"Only, you see, I know my scheme for leaving this steamer is a little out of the ordinary, and once or twice I've not been quite sure whether you liked it."

"My dear sir, your wishes are most natural."

"I really think so. You see, I dreamed of this collision every night since we left Liverpool, and here it is. And I dreamed of the horrible scramble there'll be for the boats when she sinks. So naturally I want to have swum a good distance away before the rush comes."

"Want the Purser?" said a steward. "He's over there at the end of that table." And up came another quartermaster with a second note from Captain Clayton.

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*"Send stewards to provision boats. Keep passengers below. There's a bad sea running; it will be a poor chance."*

"All right," said Mr. Horrocks. "Hand that to Mr. Jennings and ask him to attend to it for me. Now, you stewards, be quick and have those tables cleared, and then get out of the saloon."

Probably no man ever had much more keen curiosity to slip out on deck and see how things exactly were than Mr. Horrocks had just then; but he did not see his way to it. It was his duty to keep the passengers well in hand, and so far he had succeeded; but he did not flatter himself that they would keep good if he did not stay too to humor them.

It was not exactly that he dreaded getting drowned; that detail did not occur to him once. But, as most men's minds do on these occasions, Mr. Horrocks' thoughts went off to his orphanage in Cheshire. By an odd inversion of thought, the personal danger of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, did not worry him in the least, but the thought that Mr. Rocks, of the Institution, might be cut off from his usefulness and glory, made him wince and curse luck and Captain Clayton under his breath with unbenvolent point and vigor.

It was Captain Clayton who made him nervous. It was a case, as Clayton said, of life and death to him, and certainly it was of professional life and

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death. Let him lose this boat, and he would never get another sea billet as long as he lived. The Firm would blacklist him to all eternity, and so for that matter would Lloyd's. And so, where an older captain, with more standing to fall back upon, would say, "Out boats, leave her," Mr. Horrocks knew that Clayton would hang on a lot longer than he ought to, and probably make a dreadful disaster of it.

It did not take much knowledge even for those below to see that the steamer was in a bad way. The floor listed till the after-end of the saloon stood up above the forward-end like a mountain back above a valley. The forecastle head must have been pretty nearly under water. They knew that everything must be holding by one slender bulkhead, and if that gave, down she would go like a stone. Then might come Steinberg's "horrible rush for the boats" unless Mr. Horrocks was careful, and the thought of the disgrace of that—from the professional point of view of a Purser—made him hot with foreboding.

However, when all was said and done, Captain Clayton was the man in supreme command, and in moments like these there was no room for argument. Sink or swim, the responsibility was the Captain's, and the Purser recognized his limitations and set himself to his task of keeping the passengers cool and satisfied to the best of his art. If word was given, he had all arrangements ready in his mind

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for drafting them out in batches for the boats without hurry, bustle, or panic; and, on the other hand, if the danger did not come to that climax, he was doing his best to keep them amused and satisfied, and to prevent them from making ugly demonstrations in the papers when they got ashore, which might do harm to the Town S.S. Company.

So whilst the executive on deck worked for the lives of all by shoring up the plates and stringers of the buckling bulkhead, Mr. Horrocks in the First saloon played the genial master of ceremonies, and organized a scratch concert in aid of the Sailors' Orphan Home.

The usual bed hour slipped by and was ignored. People think little of temporary rest when they expect shortly to be drowned. But when three o'clock passed, and there was no further message, Mr. Horrocks began to remember that to keep his passengers up any longer would be an open confession that the boat was in danger, and that presently they would see this, and, being very tired, would probably grow nervous and troublesome.

So in his pleasant way he announced that the evening was at an end, and the passengers went to their rooms; and although there was little undressing that night, there was no trouble, and no more questioning.

In Mr. Horrock's own words: "At an awkward time like this, First Class passengers are the most

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reasonable people imaginable, if only you treat them right. But, of course, they want a man over them who does understand how they should be handled. They take it for granted that the ship's officers are doing their best, and they don't handicap matters by interference—once they have simmered down. It's the Third Class crowd you can't trust, and to make sure of them at times like these, we clap on the hatches, and leave them shut up below to scrap and squall as they please. They can't expect too much individual attention on a £3 fare, with everything found."

The Purser got out on deck at last, and had a chance to see for himself how things were. A couple of big cargo lights were slung up forward to help the deck-hands at their work, and he went and stood in the glare of one of these so that Captain Clayton could see him. Presently he did this, and called for Mr. Horrocks to come to him on the upper bridge.

"She seems to be keeping afloat, sir," said the Purser.

"There's about twenty-five feet of her gone below the water line forward, and everything depends on the bulkhead. She's full of water up to there. We shored it up from inside as well as we could, and with luck it may stand. But if a breeze springs up,

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or if we meet anything of a sea, she'll go to everlasting glory."

"I've kept my passengers quiet. Saw them all turned in before I came on deck."

"Good man. I suppose most skippers would have had them off boat-cruising before this."

The Purser said nothing. He knew his place, and was not going to take off any weight that belonged elsewhere on to his own shoulders.

Clayton deduced all this clearly enough. "Hang it," he blurted out, "a man does owe himself some consideration. I'm not going to leave my own women-kind to starve without a fight for it. If I take her in, there'll be nothing said."

"No, sir."

"Curse you, Horrocks, don't let off parrot answers like that. I tell you if I'd been on deck instead of at dinner it wouldn't have made any difference. The officers on the bridge, and the look-outs forward weren't looking ahead at all when it happened. And for why? Because out of the rain and the mist and the night there suddenly loomed out an old bark making straight for our broadside. She wasn't showing any lights, and they seemed all asleep aboard of her. Her people hardly woke to our whistle, and either they thought they'd clear us, or they were too much asleep to change her course. She crept on us like a big grey ghost, and if she'd hit us in the broad-

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side, even with her slow pace, she'd have cut us almost in two.

“I guess every man on deck watched her with bulging eyes, and in the end she cleared us by so little that her foreyard scraped the rail stanchions off our after turtle back. It was at that precise moment that we flogged into the old timber drogher that's so precious nearly done for us. There's a nice healthy piece of luck for you! It seems as though the devil himself intended to sink us whether or no just then, and only got bilked by Providence and a firm of God-fearing Clydeside shipbuilders.”

“I should like this to have happened to one of the other Lines.”

“You've to take what's given you. By Jove! I very nearly had a mutiny here at first. The officers and the deckhands seemed to take it for granted I should leave her. Someone was even brute enough to remind me that there were 800 people on board of her, and that I was responsible for the lives of all of them, and looked like murdering the lot. But if she swims long enough, I'll surprise some of them yet, and if she doesn't——”

“Man overboard!” came a shout from one of the decks below.

“Away aft there.”

“On the port quarter.”

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Captain Clayton ran over to the port side of the bridge. The Purser went at his heels.

“There he is, right in the glare of that light!”

“He’s got a life-belt on!”

“He’s swimming away from the ship!”

The Captain had given sharp orders to the fourth officer who was with him on the bridge, and the fourth officer had repeated them with prompt speed. Mr. Horrocks guessed on the instant who the man overboard was, when he heard the word “life-belt,” but he said nothing. He did not particularly want to confess that Mr. Steinberg had been too sharp for him. A boat’s crew came running up, and one of the slung-out life-boats screamed quickly down towards the water. She unhooked, shoved off, and the oars straddled out. An officer stood up at the tiller in the stern, a man stood up with a boat-hook forward. The seas hustled her about like a cork.

It was all done with discipline and precision. The chief officer ran down aft, caught sight of the man in the water, and directed the boat with a lusty voice. No one else shouted: they had been ordered to keep silence. The bowman jammed in his boat-hook shrewdly, and the swimmer protested as he was dragged in over the gunwale.

Then the boat came back alongside, hooked on, and was hauled up. “Smartly done,” said Captain Clayton. “Pass that man below to the Doctor.”

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And then he turned, keenly enough, to the carpenter, who had brought him a report from the holds.

Mr. Horrocks slipped away then, and Steinberg met him with a storm of reproaches. He was not a bit tamed by his swim. Most uncalled-for, he said, was the interference with his personal movements. But all he got out of the Purser was "Captain's orders, sir," and then was escorted down into one of the rooms aft, which was officially called the hospital, and which the Doctor used as his personal suite, the lucky dog.

The *Ambleside's* Doctor had his failings, or he would not have been aged fifty and still at sea; but he knew how to deal with a case like this. "Tut, tut," he said. "You've been swimming in the water at this temperature? Most injudicious, sir, unless you oiled your body first to keep out the cold, and I'll lay two sovereigns to a brick you forgot that."

"Well, to tell the truth, I did," said Steinberg.

"Then it's lucky you came back to me, or you'd have had a chill for certainty, with pneumonia to follow. All people do who swim in the Atlantic at this time of the year if they aren't well rubbed with oil. Here, try one of my patent drinks, and see if that doesn't warm you."

Steinberg took it like a lamb, and in two minutes he was snoring.

"He'll stay like that," said the Doctor, "for twenty-

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five hours. You see my way of treating suicidal lunatics differs somewhat from yours, Purser. I like to make sure of them."

"Your beans," said Mr. Horrocks, and went forward again about his business. He felt very sore that the Doctor had scored over him in this matter of Mr. Steinberg.

They got steam on the *Ambleside* next morning, and went on towards New York at a slow half speed. The weather was not exactly kind to them; it blew fresh out of the northwest, and there was an ugly sea running, and it was the Purser's private impression that they risked foundering every mile they ran. But all the damage was below the water line, where it did not show, and when passengers came out on deck again next morning, everything so far as they could see was just the same as it always had been. Of course boats were swung outboard, but they hung high above the awning deck, and did not show especially, and the newly filled water beakers, and the food in their lockers were also comfortably out of sight. The Purser organized athletic sports that day, and a deck quoit championship, and they had about the most exciting auction sweep on the run that he ever remembered playing auctioneer at.

Mr. Horrocks did also another thing that pleased him. He got hold of Levison and asked him to give

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£200 towards an institution known as "Rocks' Orphanage."

The man seemed a bit surprised at first, and was inclined to bully.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

"No, sir," said the Purser drily; "but Steinberg is. Do you want any further information?"

It seemed he did not, and he handed over the money at once, and kept out of the stout Purser's sight for the rest of the trip. Of course that was small enough fine for attempted murder, but Mr. Horrocks did not want to be too hard on the wretch—and have him refusing to give anything. He pictured to himself the good the money would do to Rocks' Orphanage, and the pleasure he himself would have (as Mr. Rocks, the philanthropist) in making the gift.

Thanks to the skill of Mr. Horrocks, the *Amble-side's* passengers were all a happy and contented family for the rest of the trip, and if they did come into New York three days overdue, they did not specially mind. The old boat had to be nursed delicately. She surged along with her nose in the water, and with her propeller racing as it did, she showed the pace of a dumb-barge. She carried three-quarters of her rudder in the air, and she sheered about more or less as she chose. But, what was most to the point, she kept afloat, and the other incidentals did not matter.

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They got a tug to straighten her up a bit in the steering off Sandy Hook, and when they came up to the wharf, Clayton shoved her in stern first till she grounded, as there was not water enough to let her go in bows first at all.

They were long overdue, of course, and there was a lot of excitement ashore, and, in the words of Mr. Horrocks, "there were enough reporters on the wharf to populate an entire suburb in the hot place where they'll eventually go to when they die." But he was ready for these gentlemen of the nimble pencil, and he had the whole crew of them down below, and most of the champagne that was left in the ship was set on the table.

"Business first, certainly, gentlemen. But your first and obvious business is to drink to the health of our arrival," which they did to the tune of about a magnum apiece.

Afterwards, well, the Purser had got a nice compact yarn nicely typed out and duplicated, and that was all he had to tell. He refused to make any further statement, and those newspaper men would have been more than human if they had rejected all the ready-made copy.

Mr. Horrocks had made up a most thrilling story. "*Splendid ship. No real danger thanks to the masterly way in which Captain Clayton had handled her. Clayton thoroughly deserving the purse of £300*

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*the passengers presented. Had it been a boat of any of the other Lines which sacrifice strength and construction to speed, undoubtedly all hands would have been drowned."*

"But there's nothing about yourself here, Purser," said one of the newspaper men.

"Well, boys, if you will have it, there's just this paragraph more." And he distributed round the duplicated sheets.

*"The passengers speak very highly of the kindness and attention they received from Mr. Eli Horrocks, the Purser, and we understand that there is a movement on foot to present him with a substantial testimonial."*

"There," he said, "now you have that, and you have the general account, and you have the three 'Accounts from a Passenger,' which I wrote for you to take your choice from, and I guess you have as good a 'story' as any paper could want to print."

They went off satisfied with that, and Mr. Horrocks intended to go ashore and make his report to the office. But somehow his eyes got shut, and he went to sleep with his head on the saloon table, and there he stayed for eight solid hours.

The passengers were ashore now, and the ship's honor and credit had been cared for as tenderly as might be; and now that the strain was gone, there

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were a good many men on the *Ambleside* who were thoroughly worn out.

But there was a pleasant smile on the large plump face of Mr. Horrocks, the Purser, as he slept with his head on the First saloon table. He dreamed sweetly of the philanthropic triumphs of that good man Mr. Rocks, who was so much admired by the public in a certain Cheshire village, and who knew nothing whatever about the sea and steamboats. And a tear or two of pity and gladness found their way out through his eyelids and gleamed on his eyelashes as he pictured to himself the additional waifs from the slums who could be helped with the £200 which had been so skillfully extracted from Mr. Steinberg's friend, and would-be-murderer, Mr. Levison.

# The Eloping Princess.



# The Eloping Princess.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE first thing Mr. Horrocks knew about it was from Draycott, the *Ambleside's* fourth officer, who told him he had seen two fellows plainly trying to hoist one of the passengers overboard.

“They’d have done it, too, Purser,” said Draycott, “if I hadn’t run out along the boat deck, and slipped over by a davit, and jabbed one of them on the head with the heel of my boot. They quit trying to murder the fellow then, and scooted, and by the time I’d swung myself down on to the promenade deck, they were away out of sight. Funny thing was, the fellow they’d been trying to put over the side scooted, too. He went down the first-class companion.”

“Told the skipper?” asked Mr. Horrocks.

“He was on the bridge at the time and saw about as much as I did. He didn’t seem to think consider-

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able of it. I fancy that taking the old packet along through this fog gives him all the headwork he's any use for. He was there on the bridge when I came on watch, and he was there when I was relieved. They're pretty bad for all of us, these fogs, but they're killing for a skipper. Well, I've given you the news, and now I'll be off to the mess-room and get a mouthful of grub, and then turn in."

"Wait a bit, my young friend. You've either told me too much or too little. I'm nursery maid to the passengers on this boat, and if they smash one another about I'm the man that gets blamed. What were your friends like?"

"Too dark to make sure of any of them. But the two who were trying to put the other fellow over the side had black clothes, I think, and they ran away towards the second-class; and the victim, if that's what he was, had a beard. Bit odd, wasn't it, that he didn't choose to stop to explain what their little game was with him? Oh, yes, and there's one more thing, they were cursing one another in French—or it might be German."

"Sure it wasn't Spanish?"

"Of course it might have been. But anyway it wasn't English!"

"Great Washington! What a thing it is to be a linguist."

"Steady on, Purser. Don't get stuffy. I'm paid

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to help to navigate this packet, not to act as assistant major domo."

"You're paid to do your duty by the Town Steamship Line," said the stout Purser sharply, "and the older you get, the more you will find that that includes."—Draycott had just come from command of a barque, and of course, starting on steam for the first time, he found it a trifle hard to begin at the bottom over again, and to do as he was told. But then all the Town Line's junior officers hold master's certificates, and the Purser was used to a bit of uppishness in them from time to time when they first joined—"You were quite right to report this to me. We can't have these Donnybrook games going on amongst the passengers; they injure the boat's reputation. The three passengers you saw must be found, and warned, and watched, and if necessary put under restraint. The responsibility of finding them rests upon you."

"I can't do impossibilities."

"You'd get on a heap better in this Company if you could. Let me tell you it's the officers who show brains who get promoted here. Those that can just stand and watch and eat their biscuit aren't specially wanted. Here, have a cigar. And just keep a bright look-out to-morrow for your friends of the scrimmage. If you like, come down into saloons with messages

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for someone during meal-times. Do it how you like, only anyway do it."

"Right-ho," said the fourth officer, and took himself off.

Now so far, the matter did not worry Mr. Horrocks much. Captain Clayton had evidently thought very little of it, and he was quite as keen to keep the passengers orderly as the Purser was; and what Mr. Horrocks had said to Draycott was more to impress that young man with a proper sense of his responsibilities than for any other reason. The officers which the big Atlantic passenger lines take from tramps, and freighter lines, and sail, need a good deal of breaking in that way before they are any real use to that higher branch of the mercantile marine.

But the next morning there was a row on deck which brought this other scuffle pretty sharply back to the Purser's memory. The deck steward called him out of the smoking-room with a could-he-speak-to-him-a-minute, and a look on his face that meant business.

When Mr. Horrocks' portly form was outside in the fog, "you'd better be sharp, sir," said the man. "There's a pair of them quarreling away aft there, and they mean ugly business. They won't take any notice of me. One's a foreign gentleman with a beard who came on board with two ladies, and the other's a younger gentleman, clean-shaved, that I

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rather fancy is American. It seems they fell out about a deck-chair that—”

However the Purser had not time to hear details. They came up in sight of the scuffle, and Mr. Horrocks saw a nickel-plated revolver that the foreign gentleman had produced from somewhere, tweaked suddenly out of his fingers and sent flying overboard, where it vanished like a conjurer's trick in the fog, and then his collar was taken in a good firm grip, and a sharp-toed American boot was several times kicked hard into his foreign tail. As this latter proceeding, in view of the revolver, seemed to carry some elementary justice with it, the Purser slowed his pace, so as not to unduly cut short the dose. After that, of course, he had to assume the dictator over them with due dignity and weight.

They took his lecture like a couple of schoolboys caught stealing apples. “As for you, sir,” he said to the man with the beard, “I don't know what may be the custom in your own country, but let me tell you that here on this boat I could put you in irons for attempted murder, on the evidence of my own eyes alone, and hand you over to the police ashore. And as for you, Mr. Austen, I don't think much of Harvard if they teach you there to brawl with foreigners in a public place like this.”

No answer from either of them.

“And look here, sir,” he said to the man with

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the beard, “it’s beginning to come to my mind that this isn’t the first disturbance you’ve made on board here. What about last night?”

This was a sheer outside shot of Mr. Horrocks. Draycott had only told him about a “man with a beard,” whom he seemed to think vaguely was a “foreigner.” But it seems he hit the mark. The culprit started as if someone had stuck a pin into him.

“But that was different,” he stammered. “This is different.”

“I forgot your name, sir?”

“Merliner.”

“Then, Mr. Merliner, let me tell you that you are a very quarrelsome fellow, and understand, once and for all, that this brawling is not to occur again. If it does, whatever is the excuse, you travel the rest of the way to New York in irons. I will not have the rest of the passengers scandalized and made uncomfortable by this sort of behavior.”

Mr. Merliner clicked his heels together, bowed, and took himself off, and the Purser turned to give Austen the balance of his dressing. “And I should like to know, Mr. Austen, if you were one of the rowdies who were reported to me as trying to murder that gentleman last night?”

“No, I was not.”

“Well, anyhow, you are tarred with the same brush.

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You are brawling here now, and if that's Harvard manners let me tell you—”

Austen got red. “Look here, Purser, I've taken my dose quietly, but any further hectoring I've got no use for. And let Harvard alone. That man's a quarrelsome brute—deliberately quarrelsome. Why, by your own showing, he is. You say you caught him kicking up a row last night. Well, there you are. And let me tell you this; anything he's got from me he jolly well deserves.”

“Well, we'll take it so. But you must give me your word this does not occur again.”

“I shall give you nothing of the sort.”

“Very well then, you force me to report the matter to the Captain. I can tell you offhand what his decision will be. It's foggy weather, he's on the bridge night and day, and he's got no time to worry with troublesome passengers. He'll say: 'Lock the fellow into his room till we've tied up at New York!' ”

“My father would raise a pretty wasp's nest round somebody's ears if his son came home to him that way without adequate cause. Now look here, Purser, don't be absurd. If you want to lock up anybody, put the chain on Merliner. That man's dangerous, and it's my private opinion he's mad.”

“What did you quarrel with him about?”

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"I didn't quarrel. It was he who made himself absurd."

"It takes two to build a quarrel."

"Here's the tale then. I was sitting on deck smoking, and looking into the fog, and thinking. Then who should come along but the very girl—I mean a lady that I'd noticed at one of the tables in the saloon came along, and there was a good roll on as you see, and she was evidently hard put to it to keep her footing. She seemed to be looking for a chair, and, as there wasn't another one about, I offered her mine. Couldn't do less."

"Of course not, if she happened to be the very girl you were thinking about as you looked into the fog. So she took the chair?"

"Well, yes. But she said she didn't want to rob me, so we compromised matters by my sitting down on the deck beside her. Of course, on shipboard one isn't very formal about introductions and that sort of thing. She's a Miss Schmidt, and she comes from Vienna."

"You seem to have been making good use of your time."

"I tried to," said the young fellow simply. "I've never come across a girl I admired more. But that's my own private affair, and I don't want to bother you with it. Here's what caused the row: We'd been chatting for half-an-hour, when that infernal siren

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wasn't boo-hooing above us, when up came that fellow, Merliner, from somewhere out of the fog, and promptly proceeded to make an ass of himself. Of course, I couldn't do anything before Miss Schmidt. He seemed to know her pretty intimately, called her by her Christian name, in fact; and away she went down below, either to get out of the way of his tongue, or to save a further scene. I thought it was very sensible of her. And when she was gone Merliner clicked his heels and bowed and grinned, and was going to take himself off, too. Naturally I stopped him."

"And began the quarrel."

"Hadn't he begun it already? You don't suppose I was going to sit tight after being insulted in front of a lady? We weren't taught that at Harvard anyway, Purser. He'd the nerve to say he forbid me—he, I'll trouble you, forbid me to speak to Miss Schmidt again. On which I told him that America was a free country, and the high seas belonged to Americans as much as to anybody else, and I shouldn't quit speaking to the lady unless I saw her own particular wishes ran that way. Why then he made a great fuss and pulled out a gun, and after that of course I couldn't do less in reason than take the gun away from him, and just teach him it was an argument he shouldn't have brought forward. See?"

"Mr. Austen," said the Purser, "you've been ill-

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treated by birth. You shouldn't have been born the son of a railway millionaire. You ought to have been a newspaper man. You've a grand knack of reporting a scuffle."

Austen laughed. "Well, Purser, I was real mad with the fellow, and when he did give me a chance of kicking him, I guess I kicked hard. Say, what's he to Miss Schmidt? I've a reason for asking."

"Well, what's your reason?" queried the Purser. He could guess that without being told, but he liked to see the lad blush when he mentioned her. Austen got very nicely red, and laughed.

"Never you mind. Be a good boy, now, and just tell me all I want to know."

"Can't. We print the passengers' names down on our lists, but not their pedigrees."

"Oh, I know the passenger list says—Merliner, Mrs. Muller, Miss Schmidt. Merliner sits next her at table, and there's a vacant place on her other side presumably for Mrs. Muller. I say, Purser, couldn't you give me that vacant place?"

"Certainly not. That's Mrs. Muller's place when she's through her seasickness."

Austen shoved his fingers into a waistcoat pocket and blushed redder still. "Say, I wouldn't mind making it worth anyone's while—"

Mr. Horrocks pulled him up before he plunged too far. "Mr. Austen," he said majestically, "remember

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you're not speaking to a steward," and there he left him.

The dignity of a Purser is not always sufficiently obvious to the lay mind, and as a consequence it is a property which is guarded with nice care. Passengers might be in Mr. Horrocks' society for a whole voyage, and think him the most free and easy creature imaginable. But once let them overstep the bounds, and he would chill into very icicle of pride. No man liked a valuable present better than Mr. Eli Horrocks. But it had to be given him in the proper way.

Now steamer flirtations are no very new thing to a Purser, who sees on the average eight every voyage; and most of them he does not interfere with. They please both sides when they are at sea, and once ashore they are usually forgotten. But it seemed to Mr. Horrocks that this particular entanglement was one which would bear watching. As he put it to me afterwards: "Old-man Austen, the Railway King, was a party who put a lot of business in the way of our Firm, and if Boy Austen, who was all the son he'd got, contrived to get badly mussed up with an undesirable woman whilst he was on the *Amble-side*, Old-man Austen was just the sort to take it out of the Line by way of revenge. You see when a strong man of his type gets mad, he must hit somebody before his temper simmers down, and nat-

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urally he likes to do his hitting on something where he won't be sorry for afterwards."

So a good deal seemed to depend on who this Miss Schmidt might be. All the Purser knew then was her name, that she was chaperoned by a Mrs. Muller who had been persistently seasick, and whom he had not seen, and that the man Merliner, who appeared to be a shady customer, had some sort of hold or proprietorship over her. They see funny things on the Atlantic ferry which rich young men get mixed up in, and Mr. Horrocks would not have been a bit surprised to find out that Miss Schmidt was an actress—he detested actresses—or somebody no better than she might have been, and that the whole gang of them were artistically laying for Boy Austen, with a view to harrying Old-man Austen's check book. As I say the thing is done regularly.

By good luck he happened to come across the young lady just after lunch sitting in the head of the companion, and had a spell of talk with her. She was a trifle cold, and inclined to be distant, and did not seem over and above pleased with Mr. Horrocks' offer of conversation; but he had not been a Purser all those years without finding out the knack of making a passenger talk to him civilly, whether he or she liked it or the reverse, that is if talking suited his book.

I must say, though, with this one he could not

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quite make her out. If there is anything at all wrong or shady with them, they are only too pleased to propitiate the Purser, but Miss Schmidt had got the art of making him see she regarded him as a ship's official and nothing beyond. She spoke quiet, cultivated English, with just the least flavor of some sort of accent, and if she was not a genuine lady, the Purser considered that she acted the part very well. He saw all grades of femininity, and considered himself a bit of a judge.

In his own words: "She wasn't what you'd call pretty, but she'd a pleasant enough face, and one that I should call strong, but I still couldn't be sure, of course, that she was on for blackmailing. In short, I'm free to own she rather puzzled me, and I made up my mind I'd apply for the further information I needed from Merliner. If Merliner refused to tell me what I wanted, I knew how to put the screw upon him."

However, as it turned out, the Purser got his next news of the matter from quite a different source. They had on board an American bishop, who was returning home after doing a tour in Palestine at the expense of his congregation. According to Mr. Horrocks' view, "he hadn't the class of an English bishop, as was only natural from a man who knew he could get the sack any moment he didn't please his flock, but he was a fellow of some head, and he was about

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as anxious to make himself known and popular as any creature I ever came across."

"Oh, Purser," said he, "can I see the Captain?"

"Well, I shouldn't recommend it," said Mr. Horrocks, "unless it's something mighty important. Captain Clayton's been kept on the bridge by this fog ever since we left Queenstown two days ago, and when a man's been held awake for all that time, he usually doesn't care to be bothered unless it's for something pretty big."

"What I want to consult him about, is a point in nautical law. But perhaps you can quote me a leading case. Are weddings at sea legal and binding when performed by a properly ordained clergyman like myself?"

"Depends entirely upon circumstances."

"Did you ever come across one before in your own experience?"

"H'm. Can't say I ever did. But I've heard of them."

"Authorities,'" quoted the Bishop, "'doubtful.'" He frowned and looked annoyed. "I may mention that this is an exceptional case."

"It would be. In an ordinary way people would have many objections to being married at sea. But if you'd give me a few more details, I can probably offer you a more definite opinion."

"The question is how much can I tell? The in-

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formation I am acting upon was delivered, as Rome would say, 'under the seal of the confessional.' But in confidence—am in speaking of confidence?"

"Certainly."

"In confidence I may tell you that a Mr. Merliner is the prospective bridegroom, and he has quite satisfied me as to the urgency of his reasons for marriage."

"That's sufficiently vague. May I hear the lady's name?"

"Miss Schmidt."

The Purser felt a small glow of pleasure. Here was a very simple way of insuring that Old-man Austen did not get angry, and fall foul of the line, and if Boy Austen was not pleased—well, that would not affect Mr. Horrocks much. He would probably be grateful enough over the escape in six months' time. However, the Purser had his natural curiosity still, and did not yield to the Bishop at once. "You'd much better give me the whole tale, and then I can tell you more decisively what it's best to do. Is the lady a ward in Chancery that Merliner's running off with, and he is frightened at being arrested at the other side?"

The Bishop laughed rather nervously. "No, she isn't a ward in Chancery, and I don't think Mr. Merliner fears anything the police can do to him in the States. I'm afraid you must be satisfied with

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this, Purser; the danger he dreads is on board here, and it's no less than assassination. He says there have been about six attempts to get rid of him already."

"Ah! And, come to think of it, I've seen something of this myself. Well it's got to be stopped, and quick. I can tell you we don't allow that sort of continental game on the Town Company's boats. If Mr. Merliner isn't safe at large, I'll have him put somewhere under lock and key where he can't be got at. We don't allow Anarchists of his description to bring their quarrels here for settlement."

"Tut, tut," said the Bishop. "The man isn't an Anarchist. In fact, you may take it from me he's someone very different. He's very highly placed indeed."

"I don't care if he was a shoemaker. He's got no right to be murdered, or to anyway dabble in murder on this boat. And look here, Bishop, as you've undertaken to act in some degree as his sponsor, I may tell you I'll have him put somewhere out of harm's way right now unless further explanations are forthcoming."

Well, there was the Bishop, a man who wanted to please everybody and do well for himself, fairly cornered. "My hands are tied, Purser. I much regret giving Mr. Merliner my promise of secrecy, seeing how you take what I have told you already. But

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there it is, and a promise has to be observed. I will go and see him again and make fresh representations, and get him to release me. He must release me."

"I'll lock him up if he doesn't," said the Purser shortly, "to keep him out of harm's way."

They had this talk in Mr. Horrocks' room, as the Bishop said when he first tackled him on the subject that he did not want to be overheard. No sooner had he gone, and the Purser had settled down to some ship's accounts, than there came another knock at the door, and he had to say "Come in" again. It was only a second-class passenger, so Mr. Horrocks said "Yes?" to him pretty sharply.

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### CHAPTER II.

HE was a seedy-looking individual—some sort of a German, the Purser guessed—but when he spoke, his voice was a gentleman's. He stepped inside without being invited, and shut the door behind him. “That short, stout clergyman who was in here just now was talking to you about Herr Merliner?”

“Ah?” said the Purser, “was he? May I ask what the devil my private conversation has got to do with you?”

“Oh, it was easy to guess what it was about, and we are interested in Merliner. We do not intend to let him marry that lady, and if there are no other means of separating him from her, we shall use violent ones.”

“The deuce you will! May I ask if you were one of the two rowdies who tried to put him overboard the other night?”

“Which time was that?”

“The fourth officer smacked one of you on the head with the heel of his boot.”

“No, I did not touch him that time. I merely

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directed. "Look," he said, and pulled up a coat sleeve, and showed the Purser a forearm in bandages. "He split that up for me. He wears a chain shirt himself, and that saved him several times."

"Well, you're a cheerful crowd, anyway. But why come to me? Can't you see that after what you've said, the least I can do is to ring for the master-at-arms and have you locked up out of harm's way for the rest of the trip?"

"Oh, I've reckoned on your doing that. But I've got five friends on board, who can do the work quite as well without me now that I'm wounded. What I came for was to see if you wouldn't help us, and so avoid unpleasantness. I know you purisers do not like to have fusses on your boats, and we on our side are equally anxious to avoid publicity. May I sit down?"

"No. Please remain standing. I do not choose to put criminals at their ease in this room."

"What! Have you no more idea than that about the matter yet? Why, sir, it's political, not criminal at all."

"I suppose you're a pack of beastly Anarchists, and you're pleased to call your murdering little ways political eccentricity." Mr. Horrocks put a fat finger on the bell. "More decent people have different ideas. I shall hand you over to the master-at-arms."

"You had better hear the whole truth of the matter

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first. You need not fear that I shall trespass on your hospitality by sitting down."

The man came out with his yarn then, and though queer things come to a Purser's ears pretty frequently on the Atlantic ferry, Mr. Horrocks never heard anything much more unexpected. Miss Schmidt was not Schmidt at all, but an Austrian Princess, an only child and an heiress to one of the biggest houses in that Empire. She was a cousin of the Emperor, and Mr. Horrocks, who was new to Court etiquette, was given to understand that the Emperor arranges all the marriages of this class of his subjects just as he himself sees best, and without in any way consulting their wishes or inclinations. This girl was ordered to marry a certain Archduke Fritz, and objected. The man hinted that her objections had been discourteously violent.

"By the way, isn't your Archduke Fritz an idiot, or hasn't he got a hump?" asked the Purser.

"I don't know. But he's an Archduke, and a good match. And, besides, the Emperor ordered it."

"Well, there is something wrong with him I know, but I forget exactly what it is. I saw all about it in a magazine article. Go on, Mr.—er, I forget your name."

"I am down on your passenger list as Mr. C. E. Meyer. So pressure was brought to bear on her—"

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“What kind of pressure? Thumbscrews, or red-hot pincers?”

“Pressure. I know no details. But the Emperor is accustomed to having his own way in these matters, and always gets it sooner or later. Her Highness is a young lady of strong ideas, and refused to submit. With an older lady to act as chaperone, the Countess of —, well, she is Mrs. Muller here—she managed to get across the frontier, and thought she would be able to do as she liked about Europe. She soon found the Emperor’s messengers were close after her, and how she managed to keep out of their hands and avoid being taken back is marvellous.”

“How do you work it in your pleasant country? Drug them, and stick a sack over their heads?”

“I know no details. I only know what I have told you, and that afterwards, when she began to get frightened, and went to England, she was very nearly caught and carried away from there also. I know that, because the affair had by then been placed in my hands.”

“Nice chivalrous person you must be, Mr. C. E. Meyer. Don’t you sometimes kick yourself for taking up this kind of occupation?”

“The orders came from the Emperor, and so I obey them. If the lady thinks she has cause to complain, she must remember that her own disobedience started the trouble in the first instance. At

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present she has an idea that if she marries this Baron Merliner, whom apparently she has a liking for, our pursuit will cease. I am bound to say the move will have points in her favor. Of course such a marriage would be morganatic and illegal, and whether or not the Emperor will still wish Her Highness brought back to marry the Archduke Fritz, I do not know. I should have to await instructions before acting further. But anyway my present obvious duty is to prevent this marriage."

"Oh, is it?" said the Purser. "And do you think you are boss on this ship?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I have five subordinates, who are entirely devoted to their orders. Merliner will be shot as he sits at dinner if there is no other way out of it. They will draw lots as to who is to shoot him. One man will do the business and blow his own brains out afterwards, and the others will receive promotion. It will be an exhibition (shall we say) of discipline, loyalty, and subsequent reward."

The Purser shoved his finger home on the bell push. "Forewarned is forelegged, and I'll put my right foot forward at once. You shall be in irons, Mr. C. E. Meyer, and in a safe place very much out of the way before two minutes are over."

The fellow flushed. "I beg your pardon, Purser, but is it necessary? I am an officer and (so my

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folks told me) a gentleman. I may have a code different to yours in some matters, but, at any rate, I am a man of honor. I offer you my parole."

"Perhaps you had better define the exact scope of it."

"I interfere in this matter neither by word, deed, nor look till I am clear of this ship."

"That seems comprehensive enough. You promise that?"

"I give you my word of honor."

"Very well, I take it." A steward came in in answer to the bell. "Oh, steward, bring in a small bottle of Pommery '87."

Mr. Horrocks judged that his visitor would know good wine, although he was masquerading in the second-class, and followed an occupation which was, to say the least of it, questionable. Besides the man was undoubtedly in touch with the high ones of this earth, and some day might be able to do Mr. Horrocks a good turn. You never know your luck about these matters.

"Here's to the Princess," he said, when the champagne came and was poured out, "and may she have all her own way."

"Here's to Her Highness," said Meyer, and they finished the half bottle very pleasantly between them.

"Now Mr. C. E. Meyer," said the Purser, "if

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you'll kindly go and imbibe the fog on deck, I shall be obliged to you."

"I'm entirely at your orders," said he, and took himself off, and Mr. Horrocks found the Bishop and told him that he had procured all the explanation he needed. The affair should have the Purser's professional benediction, but the Bishop must marry his man before the next meal.

"But you're sure it'll be legal?"

"Legal, my dear sir, it will be legal fast enough if you are a *bona fide* Bishop. The only thing I was hesitating about before was, would it be desirable? But I am quite satisfied on that point now. If Merliner isn't married out of their reach, his friends the enemy will shoot him dead at the luncheon table. They're the kind of fanatics that quite mean business. You may use my room for your cathedral, and now please go and fetch the lady, and I'll round up Merliner. The sooner we get this business off our chests, the sooner I shall feel easy."

Mr. Horrocks fetched Baron Merliner to his room, rang for the steward to take away the empty bottle and glasses and bring another magnum of the same, and then felt that his preparations for the wedding were complete.

He experienced no inclination to talk with the prospective bridegroom, but fell to conning over in his mind how he would dish up the story for the news-

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paper men in New York. These were gentlemen who always waited upon him on arrival to be told anything of interest which had occurred on board during the passage, and it was seldom that they were allowed to get hold of unvarnished truths, for fear lest they would damage the credit of the Line. In fact, these gentlemen of the press were the bane of Mr. Horrocks' life, and he would have cheerfully witnessed the whole newspaper world of New York and Liverpool put to death by torture.

But it was essential that he should keep on good terms with them, and there were times when they had distinct uses. For instance, this present excitement might be worked out into a really good advertisement for the Line if the press was properly handled. And it was part of Mr. Horrocks' professional equipment to possess the skill and diplomacy necessary to manage these things.

Meanwhile the time kept moving on. Mr. Merliner fidgeted and brushed at his moustache till it bristled like a cat's, and presently Mr. Horrocks began to grow impatient also. A Purser on board a boat like the *Ambleside* values his time and importance far too highly to wait very long on the pleasure of a mere Bishop who runs up no wine bills. And besides, he had as yet found no leisure to look in at the smoke-room during the whole of that morning. Indeed, he was on the point of going to hurry him

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up when in the Bishop came, looking dejected and annoyed.

“Well,” said Mr. Horrocks, “something else wrong now?”

“It’s the lady. I approached her on the subject. She refuses to entertain it.”

“Great Washington! Is this a harlequinade I’ve been dragged into?”

“I have done my best,” said the Bishop, bristling up, “and I may say I am as much annoyed as yourself. I went out on deck, and found her there wrapped up in a chair, and talking to Mr. Austen. They seemed intimate, and when I asked if I might have a few moments’ private conversation with her, she showed annoyance. However, Mr. Austen had the politeness to leave us. He comes from the States, and knows what is due to my position. His father——”

“Yes, yes. And so she would not come. Please get to the point, sir.”

The Bishop glared at Mr. Horrocks, who imagined that he used the ecclesiastical equivalent of a silent swear.” I consider I am being very badly treated over this matter on all sides. I approached the lady with pleasantries at first, and she snapped back replies straight from the ice chest. She seemed to resent my being brought into the matter at all. I pointed out to her how affairs had developed, and laid es-

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pecial stress on the danger to the Baron's life which her—*or*—refusal to play the desired part would entail. She mentioned her idea that it would have been more chivalrous of him to have taken his risks in silence."

Merliner wanted to give out his views of the matter here, but Mr. Horrocks stopped him sharply. "Look," he said, "you either wait till you're given leave to speak, or get outside this room. Your reverence has the platform still."

"I did my best to persuade her, but it was no use. The original idea of marrying the Baron here was, so she said, for her own protection, not for his; but thanks to this new light which I had thrown on the matter, she saw she was making a mistake, and would cease to look to him for protection. 'And that, sir,' she said, 'solves, I think, the point you raised about danger to Baron Merliner's life. If I refuse to marry him, none of these assassins on board here will wish to do him harm.'

"You put me in a very awkward position," I said.

"I believe you came into the matter, sir, without my invitation," was her answer, and then she formally bowed the interview to an end."

"Very good," said the Purser, "then we'll consider the whole of this foolishness over and forgotten. You're with me there, Bishop?"

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“Certainly, there’s no good advertisement in it for me.”

“The consequences appear to fall on my shoulders,” said Merliner.

“Then tell your friends, the enemy, your wedding’s off.”

“They wouldn’t believe me. However, I do not care. Under the circumstances the excitement will be stimulating.”

“No, you don’t,” said the Purser. “We’re going to have no more excitement of that kind on this boat, so you may go and take off your chain shirt, and simmer down into a peaceful citizen. I’ll go and tell the man who calls himself C. E. Meyer to switch off his cut-throats.”

The Purser went out on deck then and found Meyer. At first he was inclined to be awkward. “You must make your own dispositions, Mr. Horrocks. I gave you my parole that I would not interfere with the matter you speak of neither in word, deed, nor look till I am clear of the *Ambleside*, and I find the state of rest sufficiently agreeable, although I must say the food you give us down there in the second saloon is very inferior. Now on the German boats they feed one very differently.”

“I wish to Heaven you’d crossed by one. But let me tell you they feed one a precious sight worse in the New York Penitentiary, and that’s where you’ll

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be studying the menu next if you worry me any more here."

Meyer looked annoyed. "But I took it for granted that there was a truce between us?"

"So there is, till we touch our wharf. But once there, I can remember or not to give you up for attempted murder, as I choose. Whether you are convicted or not is another matter. But I bet you have a sweet time in the police cells waiting trial."

The Austrian drew an imaginary sword and offered the Purser the hilt. "Mr. Horrocks, I surrender. You are invincible, and, it is only the thought of a good meal ashore which makes the idea of your dinner in the second class saloon here tonight at all endurable. Merliner's well-being shall have my best attention."

"Thanks. That's quite sensible of you. I'll tell him to drop that absurd mail shirt overboard."

"On the whole I should advise him, if I were you, to place it at Her Highness' disposal to lend to his possible successor. Purser, I have the honor to wish you good morning."

"Now what," thought Mr. Horrocks to himself, "did he mean by that?" And presently, walking forward along the deck to dice someone for cigars or cocktails in the smoke-room, he was able to read the answer with his own eyes. Boy Austen's deck-chair was drawn up alongside this dangerous lady,

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and if ever Mr. Horrocks saw a couple that had fallen thoroughly in love with one another, there they sat.

Now did Mr. C. E. Meyer mean to infer that his merry men had got their eye on Boy Austen, and were prepared to murder him if necessary? It was beginning to look very much like it.

The flirtation between the pair was too obvious to be missed. The men were grinning over it in the smoke-room. "Boy Austen's hooked for sure this trip," said one. "Wonder how Poppa'll take to his only daughter-in-law?" "Bad deal for Boy Austen if the old man isn't pleased," said another. "He'll be cut out of the will, and'll have to fire an engine on one of Poppa's roads for a living." "Old-man Austen married when he was young," said another, "and took what he could get. But he's got a notion the Heir of the Austens should marry about the highest grade article there is on the market."

Then someone caught sight of Mr. Horrocks. "Here's the master of the ceremonies. He's responsible for all social events on this ferry boat. What's wrong with asking the Purser for the latest betting on the result?"

"Better apply to Captain Clayton," said that portly person. "He's the expert on board here who can see furthest through a fog."

"No flies on the Purser," said someone else, and

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then a table of them set to amusing themselves with the dice-box for drinks and cigars till lunch time.

The Purser saw Boy Austen in the course of that afternoon, and managed to get him alone. "Look here," he said, "I wish you'd take a hint from me. You'd find it a lot healthier if you left Miss Schmidt alone till we get to New York. After you've quitted the boat, of course, you can do as you please."

"Now, what the devil do you mean by that, Purser?"

"Neither more nor less than what I've said."

Boy Austen looked at Mr. Horrocks rather queerly. "I've had a couple of anonymous letters giving me the same advice."

"Quite likely. There seem to be a whole regiment of ragamuffins on board here watchdogging her."

"Of course I chucked the letter over the side."

"You would do. Told the lady?"

"No."

"Well, be wise, and let her alone till you meet ashore."

"I tell you flatly I shall do no such thing." He got very red. "I want to see as much of her as I can. Always."

"Do you know who she is?"

"Miss Schmidt."

"No such person," said Mr. Horrocks, and told

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him her exact titles and position, and concluded that that would choke him off.

He seemed to guess the Purser's scheme. "Well," he said thoughtfully, "I guess there's enough of the American about me not to let that make any difference. I've not noticed that the ladies in my country are adverse to marrying titles, and I don't see what's wrong with some of the men following their example. Anyway, I'm a better bargain than Archduke Fritz, except, perhaps, for his accumulation of grandfathers, and as for Merliner, well I call him small beans, anyway."

Mr. Horrocks laughed. "You've got a pretty cool and commercial way of totting up the chances."

"And why shouldn't I have? Great Jones! Purser, isn't marriage a thing that should last a whole lifetime? First you get very fond of a girl, and then you proceed to reckon her up and see if she's adapted to the position. It's the men that don't fulfil both those requirements that bring fees to the divorce court."

"He knew what he wanted, did Boy Austen," so the Purser told me afterwards; "and I'd a notion he knew also what Old-man Austen would like, and he set about getting it without any extra delay. He went straight away from me and proposed marriage to the Princess there and then. He mentioned he'd found out exactly who she was, and how she was

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circumstanced, and I suppose he brought forward the other items in his own way; as I have said before, it was plain to the naked eye that they were as fond of one another as a couple could be; and as a result she accepted him as her future husband, and promptly began to have horrid fears for his safety."

Boy Austen, as was perhaps natural, had a profound contempt for the idea that any mere foreigner on a British passenger steamboat would dare to assault a free American citizen, and "only hoped they'd dare to try it." He had learned the noble art of self-defence, and would enjoy heartily the chance of pounding anyone who annoyed either himself or his ladylove. "To get hitched up on board would be a mere confession of funk." They would be married with due form and ceremony ashore, and if the lady was keen on the Bishop, he might tie the knot for them.

He told Mr. Horrocks all this himself, and that worthy man got very scared about him and had him looked after a lot more narrowly than Boy Austen guessed about. The Purser was profoundly impressed with the business-like intentions of the enemy, and was sure that they would be after Boy Austen as enthusiastically as they had been after Baron Merliner. Merliner the Purser did not want murdered on board for the credit of the boat; but if they shot Boy Austen, Mr. Horrocks felt that he would have

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Old-man Austen to reckon with as well. He put this to Boy Austen, but that young man would not listen to reason. Boy Austen said that if he was willing to take his risks, the Purser might surely take his. In fact, he was a bit above himself. Young men often are during the early days of their first engagement.

But if Boy Austen would not take danger seriously, the Princess judged her fellow countrymen better, and she it was who put on the screw. She was a young woman who had got a good deal of her own way, and, if one might judge, intended to have more of it. Her ultimatum was that unless she was married there and then on the ship the engagement would be broken off. So, naturally, on that the bridegroom gave in.

Mr. Horrocks' room was used after all, and, failing anyone else, he was best man. Mrs. Muller, or whatever her name was, a fluttering old lady who was still very qualmy, sat on the settee and gave the bride away, and the Bishop went through the service with unction and skill. The Purser wanted Captain Clayton to come down and lend it his official countenance, but the fog was still very bad, and Clayton said he could not leave the bridge. He said he would enter the event in the log, when the Purser asked for that. But it was Mr. Horrocks' private belief he wanted to be clear of the business if any-

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thing went wrong. Captain Clayton made it a habit to be very careful about the feelings of millionaires and people with titles. So Mr. Horrocks felt that if anything went wrong it would be "Blame the Purser."

He fetched out the magnum after the event, and, with the exception of the Bishop, who was a tee-totaler, they all did well at it, and felt cheered, and Boy Austen gave his views on Emperors who tried to dragoon their female subjects into distasteful marriages. "However, they'll not play any more kidnapping games now," said he, confidently enough. "I quite agree she's worth pulling down the whole of the United States to get, but there's no European nation will try that. We should make war quicker'n you can think on any country that tried to steal one of our citizens that way."

They both seemed very pleased with what they had done, and went out into the fog for their honeymoon, and the Bishop escorted Mrs. Muller back to the couch in her own room, poor old lady.

Mr. Horrocks found Meyer then and told him what had taken place. Meyer showed a great deal of annoyance, but he took the sensible part. "I tell you frankly," said he, "that after we'd done with Merliner, I thought the coast was clear. I'd no idea she'd marry the other fellow in such indecent haste.

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Of course anyone of Royal blood can't marry a commoner legally. It's only a morganatic union."

"I bet American courts won't take that view," said the Purser cheerfully.

"Time will show. Time will show, too, whether my Emperor still wants her back. But in the meantime our hands are tied, and must remain so till we get ashore, and wire for further instructions."

"That's all right," said Mr. Horrocks. "Come and have a glass of fizz. Once off this ship, I don't care, though personally, I should say you will find that the pair of them, with the American nation at their back, will be a bit above your weight to handle."

One way and another Mr. Horrocks had got a story which would suit the newspapers down to the ground, and he spent a good many hours knocking it into shape that would do best credit to the Line and bring the boat a sound advertisement. He typed out his fair copy nicely, and manifolded it so that each of the reporters could have it as a groundwork; and when the boat got in and the newspaper men clustered round him, they took the sheets from him with howls of delight. Mr. Horrocks had a fine journalistic instinct.

"My hat!" said the *Globe* man, "what a scrumptious story. But is this honest Injun, Purser?"

"Real live Princess," said Mr. Horrocks. "Silk

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all the way, no cotton tops. And if you don't know Boy Austen for yourselves, that's not my fault."

"He's all right. Two years my junior at Harvard. Pushing young pup. Say, Purser, what's this I heard on deck about your engines getting a hot bearing, and the hose running on it all the trip, and the engineer staff going on watch in oilskins? We could get a bit more copy out of that."

"No such thing on this boat. Engines run like a watch. That happened to the Blue Moon boat in the next berth."

"Old-man Austen ought to give them a Palace car and a private train as a wedding present. I'll say he has done anyway. I see you're in on schedule time. We've had fog here. Been clear with you?"

"Oh, yes. Not sunshine, y'know, but nice passage."

"That all? Not passed any whales, icebergs, derelicts, or notions of that kind?"

"Been too busy looking after the Princess affair to see."

"That's a good point. 'Too busy sheltering Princess.' Well, good-bye, Purser. Wave long and bring us good stories."

And so the yarn got sent the round of the American press, and in due time was cabled back to England and the Continent. In Germany and Austria it made considerable stir, and this, of course, got

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reported back again in the English papers, and did Mr. Horrocks a good turn. Mr. William Arthur, manager of the Line, saw it, and it suited his mood finely. What with the competition of the German passenger boats against the Town Line, and the food they give which has forced the Town boats to improve their catering, he naturally hated Germany and everything German pretty poisonously. Nothing was said about the Princess affair when the *Ambleside* got back on the return trip, till all the ordinary routine matters were gone through. Business always came first with Mr. William Arthur. But when the Purser was leaving his private room to go to the outer office, he said:

“I’ve been told what you did about Austen’s lad and that Dutchwoman.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you’re not such a dam’d fool as I’ve often thought.”

“No, sir.”

“That’s all.”

Mr. Horrocks went away well pleased. It was not often the head of the firm condescended to praise.

Moreover he had another cause for complacency. Austen senior had shown his gratitude by making Mr. Horrocks a present of £200. But he had more *savoir faire* than his son; he ministered to the Purser’s pocket without hurting the Purser’s pride. His

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present took the form of a single-stone emerald pin, which Mr. Horrocks naturally returned to the jeweller from which it had been bought, and received the cash equivalent.

There are decencies about these matters which all well-trained and decently-travelled people know how to observe.



# **Diamond Cy.**



# Diamond Cy.

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## CHAPTER I.

“MY dear Purser,” said Captain Clayton, “if I thought you were smuggling, or giving help to smuggling, I tell you candidly I’d send the Customs’ people a hint at once.”

“You weren’t always so particular,” suggested Mr. Horrocks.

“Some bits of history are better forgotten. And besides, I was only chief officer then. Now I’m in command, and the boat stands for more to me than, perhaps, you’d imagine; and, anyway, I’m very jealous of her chastity. We’ll have no smuggling, please, Horrocks.”

“Well,” said the Purser rather crossly, “you know where I dined last night, and with whom?”

“You dined with me at the Adelphi.”

“You and I weren’t the only people at the table.

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You'd got ten of a party, hadn't you, to square up for when the bill came?"

Captain Clayton set his teeth. "Well, Horrocks, my wife likes entertaining, and so do her sisters."

"What I meant to suggest was, that your wife was there. It was she that gave me the first hint that there was some stuff somebody very much wished to be helped through the New York Customs, and, 'pon my life, I thought you knew all about it too, or I'd have kept my head shut. Mrs. Clayton said she stood to win a diamond crescent, if it came off. She said she'd seen the crescent, and it was a beauty, and she mentioned that she adored diamonds. She wears a good many, I've noticed."

"Yes," said Clayton shortly. "She got them when she was on the stage. You know that as well as I do. But she has to be content with what she's got, and I trust is content. My means don't run to diamonds. It's hard enough to keep to windward of ordinary expenses."

"You've got a fine notion of spreading yourself ashore. But if it was my wife, I'd get her that crescent the cheapest way. She intends to have it somehow."

"Look here, Horrocks. Will you kindly leave me to my own private thumbscrews?"

The Purser laughed. "That's snubbing me. Well, I took the risk with my eyes open. I guessed you'd

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tell me to mind my own business when I mentioned your wife, and that you'd mind yours. But you see, in a way it was made my business too, and I wanted you quite to know how we stood."

"Look here, you nuisance, will you shut up?"

"Yes. And now come and have a bit of cheap lunch. We'll consider we've tossed for it, and it's on me."

Perhaps it takes a very high-minded man to see black crime in smuggling diamonds into the United States, and one must confess that anyway Mr. Horrocks' conscience was easy about the matter. All purzers do it, or wink at it for a consideration, or help at it—if only they get the chance. As Mr. Horrocks put the matter to me: "It all depends on a tariff. If there's no duty on importing diamonds into New York, you may bring in all that you've money to buy, without declaring them, and nobody objects; but if some renegade Irishman, who's a member of Congress, gets paid to make a tariff which claps on a heavy *ad valorem* duty, why then, if you try to slip through the Customs, there are people who want to make out you are first cousin to a thief and a forger.

"Smuggling," he went on to say, "is mostly done for vulgar profit, and some people will say it is much like gambling on stocks and shares, or on a horse, where you take a big risk in the one hope of

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making a big return without earning it. You want brains and artfulness there if you're going to make anything like a habit of winning.

"Smuggling diamonds always strikes me as no more iniquitous and much more sporting. If you put your money on a horse or a gold mine, you stand either to lose it or to skin the other fellow. But your liability's limited. If you buy a stock of diamonds this side, with the intention of running them through free of duty, it's a different thing. You've got your work cut out for you right along. You've got some of the brightest intellects in the United States against you. And you've to manœuvre like a chess player if you want to get round them. Remember the one-eyed man who tried to smuggle diamonds through in his hollow glass eye? They got him, first shot. It is no use trying to smuggle them in your boot heel, or to make your dog swallow them, or to have them stuck inside a real original Greek antique statue. These games only make the Customs tired, and they smell out the diamonds as though they were onions, and the result is you not only lose the original capital you've sunk in the venture, but you find yourself let in for further liability in the shape of fines, and costs, and so on.

"So you see the game's raised above the level of mere stock exchange or racecourse speculation into a very sporting enterprise indeed; and if you ask

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me, it's as much that as the mere profit of the thing which drags so many people into it. This is the way: a fellow gets a smart idea: he finds he owns a hollow tooth that's an ideal hiding-place, or it occurs to him that no Custom House officer would search a bottle of salts, and he goes into the smuggling business out of sheer pride to prove that his theory's right. And there's another thing. Diamonds have a fascination for some people, especially women, just as horses have for others. They love them for their own sakes alone, and will do a lot just for the chance of being near and handling them."

The man who was at the bottom of the little game Mrs. Clayton wanted Mr. Horrocks to join in, was an old practitioner. He traveled for a Connecticut firm in England and the Continent, and his line was agricultural machinery, and he made a very good thing out of it. His tale was that none of the English firms could turn out a reaper and binder, or any other machine, either in price, weight, or effectiveness to compete with those produced by the American Trust, and apparently the tale had enough truth about it to be swallowed, and he was annexing the trade as fast as his works could fill the orders. He was one of the best-known passengers in the Western Ocean, and as he always took an expensive room, and ran up big wine bills, Mr. Horrocks made it his

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business to see that he liked him, and did most of his traveling on the ship on which he was Purser.

The man had got a surname stowed away somewhere, but no one ever heard it—at least on board ship. Even if he came on to a boatload of strangers, it slipped out before she was clear of the Mersey that he was Diamond Cy, and that was all the name he ever got. No one ever lengthened it out to Cyrus, and no one ever gave him the surname, much less a Mister. One could not possibly be anything but familiar with him.

As the Purser described the man to me: “I’ve seen stiff, starched English, who would have made chilly corners on an iceberg, thaw down straight away when Cy chummed up with them. I even saw a bishop once drink champagne with him in the morning before luncheon, though you could tell all the time he was wondering why the blazes he did it. Common wasn’t the word for him. He’d an accent you could take away and drive in as a railroad spike, he’d clothes like a music-hall comic, his hats and boots and linen were varnished till they shone like glass, and he’d diamonds all over him wherever they’d stick. He was a little meagre bit of a chap, about the build of a jockey, and I tell you he’d a way about him that no one could snub if he intended to be friendly.

“As a matter of fact, it was few enough people

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who ever tried the snubbing game. We always have our constant passengers between Liverpool and New York, and these get to know one another with an intimacy that would surprise those folks who only understand meeting one another every day in a train ashore."

Cy, as the stout Purser explained to me, was worried by no nice feelings. Let him have plenty of people staring at him, and talking to him, and valuing up his diamonds, and he was as happy as a brewer with a brand new baronetcy. Ashore he sold agricultural machinery for all he was worth. But on shipboard was his holiday, and he played at it a hundred and ten cents to the dollar. He felt that he was top of his own particular line, and he wouldn't have changed his billet to become second man anywhere.

"I often pity your Prince of Wales," Cy said to the Purser once, "he's such a very poor taste for jewelry. Now if I were a man in his position I'd wear a band of brilliants round my hat at the very least. I'd set the fashion. Guess I hain't enough gall about me just now to hoe a new row like that, though I'll allow the idea's occurred to me, and I've been very much tempted more'n once. No, s'r, I could do with being King of Britain, but, if anything less was offered, I reckon I'd rather stay as what I am.

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*I've got no use for being cramped like your Prince of Wales."*

It was Cy, then, who offered the diamond crescent to Mrs. Clayton in return for a little help, and it was Cy who told Mr. Horrocks that there was a check for a nice round sum waiting all ready made out in his name, and the Purser knew that if he was going to make a run of diamonds through the New York Customs, it would not be for a mere nutshell full of stones. If Cy did anything at all it would be big, even if it was only for the sake of boasting about it afterwards.

Besides, rumor went about that Cy was retiring from the active pursuit of commercial traveling. He had been so successful that he had pulled together a competency, and was going to be made a director of the Trust, so that he could stay in one place and show off his diamond watch-chains and other decorations to a home audience. Eccentrics of his description meet with more general appreciation in the United States; in England people seem to lose the humor of them after the first look.

Of course there are one thousand ways in which a purser like Mr. Horrocks can help a little game of this sort, and Cy knew that well enough, and looked upon the check he offered just as so much money spent in insurance. It would have been all worked smoothly, too, if he had left the matter in Mr. Hor-

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rocks' hands. But the man was too loose-lipped. He had gabbled and boasted and promised to Mrs. Clayton, and insisted on having the Skipper bear a hand, and here was the Skipper unexpectedly cutting up rusty. The worst of it was from Mr. Horrocks' point of view, if a Captain takes that line, a purser is seriously handicapped; he dare not take the risk of being reported.

So on the whole Mr. Horrocks decided to keep out of the affair, and to give Cy notice to that effect.

He found him with some difficulty, and got him on one side with more. "Take the cinch from me," he said, "and leave those shiny goods of yours in the bank. Skipper's got his back up, and it's quite on the cards he'll give the office to the Customs himself. Wait till you're across next time, and have your flutter then."

"Shucks! Clayton's a white man. And besides, his wife'll have gotten him talked round by this. Guess she means having that crescent."

"Look here, Cy. Do you know Captain Clayton best, or do I? Remember he's new to command, and he's very high flown notions about the purity of the boat——" And so the Purser went on at him, and in the end came to the conclusion he had convinced him to a certain degree. Cy said he would not try to run his diamonds this trip. But at the same time he was perfectly convinced that the Purser

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was wrong about Captain Clayton, and said so with enough emphasis to ruffle Mr. Horrocks' dignity. He was a bit too authoritative for Mr. Horrocks' taste, was Diamond Cy when he'd been dining, and he had been dining that evening rather copiously.

A purser like Mr. Horrocks is pretty well harassed with work on the day of sailing, and so next morning he gave Master Cy little thought. Old hands do not seek much attention from the Purser when they come aboard. They know their names are ticked, and their bedroom stewards are waiting for them, and they are put down already for the best table places available; and so they just clap their hand baggage in their rooms and lock the door, and go off for a smoke till the bustle is over and the boat is down river.

As Mr. Horrocks said: "It's your tourist, or your theatrical, who wants what's set aside for his betters, and tries to turn the ship upside down to get it, and drains the Purser of his soothing powder. We'd an extra consignment of the tourist class that trip, including two lords and a member of Parliament, and a Jew chap who wrote novels and lectured upon them, and each seemed to think that the Atlantic Ferry was run for his especial benefit. So I had to let each see that I understood that this was so, and to tell him in confidence that the firm had given

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special instructions to see that he got extra attentions.

“‘It’s always better to tickle a fool than tease him,’ is what our Mr. William Arthur is always rubbing into the Firm’s Purzers, and there’s no denying it’s a splendid motto to work on. For instance, by blarneying that slobbery novelist, I got out of him that he had sneaked a free pass out of one of our agents—who ought to have known better—and had promised to write up the boat in one of the papers.

“‘Could I come to you, Mr. Horrocks, for my matter? Of course I want information about things which passengers usually do not see.’

“‘You’ve just come to the right man, sir, for that,’ I told him. ‘There’s lots of things I know about this trade that ought to be exposed in print, but it takes a man like you to write them up. Spicy things.’ And so I got rid of him, and made a mental note to load him up with as much fiction as he’d carry, and to take care he didn’t see anything through his own silly spectacles that was intended to be hid. Men like that novelist are the bane of a purser’s life. They are always nosing around for ‘articles,’ and ‘yarns,’ and ‘paragraphs,’ and if you don’t take care, and let them print everything they come across, they’d scare half the passengers off the ‘Atlantic.’”

So what with one thing and another Mr. Hor-

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rocks was pretty well run to keeping his peace and getting his passengers stowed away, and he was none too pleased when a message came from the Captain to him in the saloon that Cy wanted to see him on deck.

If it had come from Cy alone (who ought to have known better) the Purser would have taken it for a joke, and refrained from going; but when Captain Clayton backed up the message by compliments and a request that meant an order, the Purser had no choice. So he smiled at the new batch of passengers who had come up to pester, and cursed at the back of his teeth, and went up the companion with the most rapid steps his portliness and dignity would permit of.

The matter happened in the days before the big boats came alongside the landing stage, and there was the tender grinding against the ship's side in the tideway, and Captain Clayton and doctor and first officer standing at the place of reception in full uniform. Captain Clayton had the knack of making passengers think that he felt lonely without a sword thumping against his hip, and if any of them did not notice the *Ambleside's* blue ensign, and find out what it was there for, it was not the fault of her commander. "And after all," as the Purser used to remark, "what's the use of being R.N.R. if you don't let people know it? You get

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precious little out of the Reserve, except complacency."

However, there was Captain Clayton, but there was no Cy; so Mr. Horrocks went up sharply enough and said, "Yes, sir," in a tone calculated to suggest that he was a very busy man, and was much needed elsewhere.

"Sorry to call you away, Purser, but one of the passengers—er—I forget his proper name—well, it's Diamond Cy—has had a big smash, and insists that you as an old friend should go and help him aboard. I sent the doctor to him, but he—er—wasn't amenable."

"Used most infernal language to me," said the doctor. "Told me he was too broke up to take any extra chances from a—"

"Very well, sir," said the Purser sharply, "I'll see to him," and away he went across the gangway on to the tender. Sure enough there was Cy on the deck laid out on a hospital stretcher, all covered up by a rug, looking very ill.

"Thank whiskers you've come, Purser," he gasped out. I'm all broke up into five-cent sections. Only held together by splints—oh!—and sticking plaster. For God's sake, old man, make them carry me gently to my room. The brutes nearly killed me when they brought me on this beastly tender. You had a broken

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leg yourself once. You told me about it. That's why I wouldn't let that butcher of a doctor help."

"You've sent for just the right man," said Mr. Horrocks. "You shall be taken to your room as easy as a conjuring trick. You shut your eyes now, and put your money on the Purser. I'll have you wafted across in half a pig's whisper, and you shall never know what's happening. Wish I may break my own leg if you're hurt. There, shut your eyes, and from when I give the word you won't jolt against anything else till you touch your bed. Now, you bearers, both together, lift!"

The bearers certainly showed abominable clumsiness; and then they had some trouble in clearing the alley-ways, so that the wounded man should not be jostled; and next, some timorous creature got the notion that Mr. Horrocks was bringing a small-pox patient on board, and he had to explain to most of the passengers individually that it was no such thing, and that a broken leg is not catching. Indeed, a Purser on one of these big boats requires a high coefficient of tact and placidity if he is to preserve his temper, and keep the peace, when she is getting started.

However they got Cy down to his room at last, though whilst they were shifting him from the stretcher to the settee he used language that would have made a Spanish inquisitor stop and think.

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The man had a tongue in him, when he chose to use it, like the mate of a cargo tramp.

Mr. Horrocks could stand a good deal of this sort of thing, but felt it due to his position that he should draw the line somewhere. "You seem to have got it bad," he said stiffly, "in everywhere except your voice."

"Guess you'd loose off a bit if you'd your bone-ends grating together like mine. And where I'm not broke I'm bruised."

"I'll send the Doctor to you."

"If you do, I'll use language to that man that's calculated to wound. Guess I've only been practicing up to now. No, s'r, I've got no further use for doctors. I've been put to the torture sufficiently these last few hours to fill me up for the rest of my natural life, and, kill or cure, your ship's Doctor doesn't put his breath into this stateroom. Henry still bed-room steward here?"

"Yes."

"Henry's part of the boat. Henry'll fix me, with the help of that chap that's just gone out. He's a hospital attendant I brought along, and he can have the spare berth and sleep in here with me. Never thought I'd come down to not having a room to myself. I'll square up with you for his passage afterwards."

Mr. Horrocks slipped away then, and saw the hos-

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pital attendant in the alley-way outside. "Cy seems to have got it bad," he said.

"Yes, sir. Knocked down by a cab."

"Pretty full at the time?"

"I think he was, in a manner of speaking, inebriated, sir."

"He was getting on that way when I saw him last night. You know you're to sleep in his room?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's first-class. So you meal in the first-class saloon. I'll tell the chief steward to put your name on a place."

"Begging pardon, sir, but I should be in a manner of speaking out of my element with the society. If you could make it second-class?"

"Certainly," said the Purser. "Very proper feeling on your part. I'll see to it."

Mr. Horrocks took a liking to that hospital attendant. As he explained it to me afterwards: "He saved me a lot of trouble by his sensible action. Wherever I'd put him in the first-class saloon I should have had some shirty passenger coming up to me and want to know what the devil I meant by giving him a flunkey as his dinner companion. 'They never do that on the Blue Moon line, or the German boats, and I don't think your directors would approve of it here if only they knew about it.' And mentioning that somebody paid full first-class fare for the poor

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beggar, and that therefore he was entitled to his full privileges, was no argument. 'Put him next somebody else, then. Put him next yourself if you're so keen on him,' was what they'd reply. There's no getting passengers to see the balance of things."

However, Mr. Horrocks had no time for moralizing then. Back he had to go to the saloon to get the passengers sorted and settled. The member of Parliament bombarded him with stilted abuse because he was put at the doctor's table, and the novelist offered to run him in as a character in one of his books if Mr. Horrocks put him next to a lord. He certainly did only have three people that day who wanted an assurance that their sheets were properly aired, but on the other hand he had no fewer than four different brands of clerical gentlemen, who wanted the loan of the saloon for daily prayers. Moreover, a record number of fools pestered him that day to guarantee them a smooth passage and no seasickness. "The Red Funnel boats do it, and why can't you?" "The German boat came across the other day with no one ill." "Can't the Captain go round some other way if this one's rough?" And fancy having to give a civil and soothing answer to each of them.

Indeed the Purser was about worn out by the time the smoke-room lights were switched off that night, and when a steward brought word that the

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Captain would like a chat with him in the bridge charthouse, he began to wish he had a billet ashore with only fourteen hours work a day. However, at sea, being tired does not come into the scheme.

“Sit down, Purser. Have you seen our friend Cy again? Do you think he’s really hurt? Or is it a little game he’s trying to have on?”

“If you heard him swear, sir, you’d believe he’s genuine enough.”

“Well, that may be. But anyway he’s still sticking to his scheme of smuggling those diamonds into the States without paying duty.”

“But he told me plainly, sir, that he’d given it up.”

“Told you wrong then, Purser. You know the New York Customs have their men over in Liverpool, and they’re hand in glove with our Customs. Now Master Cy is a pretty notorious person, and they’ve been having him pretty shrewdly watched. He’s got the parcel on board here with him.”

“Oh.”

“Now you’ll please understand, Mr. Horrocks, that no officer of this ship is to have any dealings with those gems otherwise than to assist the New York Custom House in performing its proper functions.”

“You’ve mentioned that to me before.”

“I know, when we were ashore. But our relations

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were slightly unofficial then, and I don't want any mistake. So I tell you now quite officially."

"Very good, sir. I quite understand."

"Then that's all, Purser. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Mr. Horrocks was tired enough, as I have said, and he was not long in getting turned in. But it was well on into the morning before he found any sleep. What was Cy's game? And could he have a finger in it, and touch his profit without getting burned? Mr. Horrocks felt that it was all very well for Clayton to be puritanical. As he put it to me: "The Skipper had lots to gain indirectly by being in with the Customs. And, besides, he'd other legitimate pickings.

"To be sure, he wasted a lot of time over lords and that class, out of sheer vanity (as I called it) at being able to say he knew them. But at the same time he mostly contrived to let his room each run for a tidy sum. You know, there's a type of passenger that takes a delight in saying: 'The Captain gave up his own cabin to me.' And likewise he naturally had the sense to make himself civil to that class of American millionaire that gives a Captain silver salvers and services of plate, which sell, if you go to the shop where they were bought, for very nearly what they cost.

"I won't say altogether, too, that his wasting of

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time over the folks with the titles was not capital well sunk, because the millionaire class love dearly to hear about them at second-hand—and hence the presents of salvers. But, anyway, what I mean to point out to you is that Captain Clayton had lots of pickings, whether he made the most of them or not, whereas I, as Purser, had precious few. It's annoying enough to see twenty-dollar bills going to chief stewards, and valuable scarf pins to captains, when it's really you that's managed all the passengers' comfort; and, of course, you'd have too much proper pride to accept them if they were offered; but that's one of the penalties of the position, and so you've got to use your wits to find dividends in other ways."

## DIAMOND CY.

### CHAPTER II.

MR. HORROCKS had no time to look in on Cy till after the *Ambleside* had left Queenstown, and when he did go in, the invalid was inclined to be resentful at not being called on before. However, the Purser was not fool enough to apologize.

“You’d got your language stop out too much for my taste,” he told him. “But if you don’t want me now, I can go right off to the smoke-room.”

“Oh, I weaken. Sit down, Purser, and help yourself to rye. There’s a bottle in my gripsack. Guess if you knew how mighty sick I was, you’d sling a bit more sympathy round. I’m feeling as if I couldn’t take a pride in anything, not even in dress.”

“Did you get robbed when you were knocked down? With all those diamond watch chains, and studs, and bootlaces—or is it braces-buckles—that you sport, you are worth looting as a general thing.”

“No, I was lucky there. I suppose an honest man must have picked me up. I should like to have rewarded him. I’ve an affection for a man that’s kind to my diamonds.”

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"Then you may prepare to love me, Cy. I came along here to give you another straight tip about that parcel of gems you want to smuggle into the States. You were a fool not to leave them behind in the bank as I advised you. But as it is, just be a wise man, and declare them and pay the duty. You'll find it cheapest."

Cy looked considerably upset. He said he had been a good deal shaken up by his accident, and naturally his nerves were not in the best order.

"Cute bluff of yours, Purser. But what's wrong with their being in the bank?"

"This. They've had a detective on you in Liverpool, and it is known you brought the diamonds on board here. Captain Clayton knows, anyway, and he's warned me officially not to help you. I should say it's just a moral certainty he lays information about you himself."

"Most natural thing for him to do if he's soured on the idea of standing in. No, sir, I don't blame the Captain any for fiddling out the tune for his own benefit. But, all the same, I don't think my great and glorious country is going to scoop a lump of duty out me this trip. Guess I'd feel real mean if I couldn't walk my little lot round them."

Mr. Horrocks shook both his sides in a pleasant laugh.

"Well, Purser, I don't mind owning to you that

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I have that parcel of stones right here in my baggage. When you saw me that night before we sailed, and gave me the cinch, I'd a mind to weaken and shove them in the bank next morning to wait over for another trip. But I guess I got a bit on the ra-ta that night, and after the accident I was too crumpled up to think of anything except how it hurt. So my trunks were packed by that hospital attendant with what was there in my room, and I'm taking it on trust that the diamonds are in the Saratoga under the settee you're sitting on. But, to tell the truth, I'd like to make sure."

"Anything I can do?"

"If you would, old man. I know I can trust you. As for the hospital attendant, he may be all right, but I've only his word for that, and £10,000 worth of diamonds is a big temptation. Here are the keys."

Mr. Horrocks pulled out the Saratoga, unlocked it, and threw back the lid.

"Steady on," said Cy, "this isn't a game of hide-and-seek. There should be a pair of yellow-topped patent leather boots with lasts in them?"

"They're here."

"Take out the middle tongue of the last in the right boot."

"So?"

"That's it. Now screw out the ring at the top."

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The Purser did that. There was a brass washer underneath the ring, but instead of a mere rod of metal beneath, there was a salid screw plug the size of the washer, and inside was chamois leather which rose up gently when the pressure was taken away from it.

“Good man, Cy. That’s a brand-new and original kind of hiding-place, and I believe it’s almost good enough to bluff a New York Customs’ sharp.”

“Pull ‘em out, siree, and see my stock. There should be just sixty-three stones. I guess you’ll know me for enough of an expert to take my word for it that there isn’t a flaw in any of them.”

Mr. Horrocks picked out an end of the chamois leather, and drew out a neat little case, wound up into cylinder form with silk. He undid this, and spread it out carefully on Cy’s counterpane. A great blaze of cut diamonds twinkled and shimmered before him like some essence of rainbows.

“Aren’t they things to say your prayers to, Purser? Guess you never saw a parcel of stones like that before. Look at the color of them.”

“They seem nice and white.”

“White! They’re blue Brazilian diamonds, every one of them. Why, they don’t show yellow even on that shammy leather. None of your off-color stones for me. I’ve a reputation to keep up, and I know how to pick diamonds that’ll do it. Yes, sir. I’ve

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an eye for color in stones that'd surprise most men that think themselves experts."

"All your sixty-three are here by my count."

"Then let's put 'em back again. Taint over healthy letting this kind of real estate smell too much daylight aboard ship here. You never know who may come to pay a polite call, and think it more genteel to stay just in earshot outside the door. There you are. Valet my boot for me again, Purser, will you?"

Mr. Horrocks rolled up the diamonds in the chamois leather, served it round with the silk, and slipped it in place. He screwed in the plug, crammed down the middle tongue of the last into its place in the patent leather boot, and put it back in the Saratoga trunk, and then, with a sigh, he closed the lid.

"Now, Purser," said Cy, "you see how I'm fixed. The diamonds are here on board, and they've got to be run. The question is, who's going to do it? Would you like to have an invitation to dine ashore, after we get in, and take off a bag with you to dress at a hotel, and carry those boots in your bag?"

"It would be a big risk."

"No, sir. I don't think it. In fact I guess the risk is so small that the fee for portage doesn't seem to me to foot up to more than £40."

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Mr. Horrocks got up majestically and reached for his cap. "It seems to me," he said unpleasantly, "that you've made a mistake. I'm not a steward, Cy, to pick up your paltry tips. I took you for a gentleman, and I'm sorry I made a mistake. If people don't offer to deal reasonably and fairly with me, I don't do business with them at all."

"Say now, Purser, don't go and lose your hair over it. I offer a fair price, and if you don't choose to take it, there's an end of the trade."

"So far as I'm concerned."

"And all that's been said is in confidence."

"Of course. I know nothing about any diamonds except the half-pint or so you wear in sight; and as for lasts in patent leather boots, I never heard of such things."

"You're a white man right through, Horrocks," said Cy, and there the Purser left him. If Master Cy chose to be so injudicious as to run up against the Purser's dignity with so small a bribe, it was somewhat natural that the Purser should nourish a slightly vicious hope that Cy might be led to see the error of his ways. The boot with the hollow last was a very clever scheme no doubt, but the New York Customs officer had smelt out hiding-places as canny before, and, moreover, this time they would start with the advantage of knowing almost for a certainty that illicit diamonds were in

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Cy's luggage somewhere, and so it was probable that they would go on searching till they found them.

However, Mr. Horrocks had little enough time to waste on Diamond Cy and his affairs for the rest of the trip. As he put it to me: "There was that Jew novel writer to be attended to. He was sick for the first two days, and I tried to get the Doctor to give him something that would keep him sick till we got to New York. But the Doctor, malicious old fool, wouldn't; laughed and said that what I was paid for was to keep passengers of this sort in talk; and that is just what I had to do. The nasty slobbering mouth of the fellow nearly made me sick, and the way in which he talked about himself, and his fame, and his books, was disgusting. But there was no doubt about his ability for mischief, and so I had to take my precautions.

"I sent word round amongst the stewards that I'd sack any man who yarned to him, with a 'Decline to report' on his discharge ticket, and I set myself to gain his affections. Lord! In two days the beast began to think that I regarded him as a long-lost brother, and I loaded him with enough stuff to go on advertising the Line for all his remaining days. He wanted to know about everything, and he was by no means a fool in his questioning; but I hadn't been handing over reports to newspaper men all my years without knowing exactly what to give them.

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with safety, and exactly what looks safe but can be distorted, and exactly what must be kept away from them at all hazards.

"These writing animals do catch hold of a tramp's skipper or an old deck-hand occasionally, and get to know about what goes on aboard the class of vessel that carries no passengers; but on the big liners it's another thing; and it's an officer's chief duty to see that nothing leaks over into print that can do the boat or the Company that employs him harm."

Especially was this person desirous of knowing how diamonds were smuggled, and Mr. Horrocks gave him a lot of useful information on that subject which he piously hoped would tempt him to get credit for a consignment, and then find himself caught and in jail. It was one of the great drawbacks of Mr. Horrocks' professional life that he had to supply his smiles, and his jests, and his genialities free gratis to certain passengers whom he cordially wished at the bottom of the sea.

"I hear there's a celebrity called Diamond Cy on board," the novelist said to him one day. "Couldn't I get to see him?"

"Impossible, my dear boy," (Mr. Horrocks explained to me that he always called theatricals, and acrobats, and authors, and that lot "dear boy," because he said "they seemed to expect it.") "Cy's all crumpled up and don't receive visitors. But I

## DIAMOND CY.

can give you his full particular history if you wish it.”—And he did so.

“I was told privately that he’s going to run a big lot of diamonds through the Customs this time.”

“Very likely. There’s mostly that yarn floating about any boat Cy decorates with his presence. But I should say it’s never true. ’Tisn’t his line, any more than it’s mine or yours. A few blessed Dutchmen from Hatton Garden keep the monopoly of that trade in their own hands.”

“H’m,” said the novelist, but Mr. Horrocks did not think he was convinced, because he went on so quickly to other topics. So he looked in at Cy’s room again that evening, and told him people were talking about him. “You’ll be nabbed as sure as Heaven made little apples,” said Mr. Horrocks, “if you don’t cut your profits and declare your stuff in the usual way.” But Cy was feeling grave and cantankerous, and the most he would do was to take an omen from the Fates.

“Is there a pool on the run to-day?” he asked.

“Certainly.”

“Very well. Then will you buy for me the middle three numbers?”

“At what kind of price?”

“Bid till you get ’em. If I win either of those, or if any of the three numbers on either side of them

## DIAMOND CY.

pull it off, my luck's going to be clear. If not I may have to look out."

"Poor sort of way of making omens," said the Purser, and left him. He went to his room again after lunch. "Cy," he said, "you're a gloomy prophet. Those three middle numbers were run up to an extravagant figure, and you owe me £20 for them."

The sick man handed over the money, and Mr. Horrocks deposited it in a place of safety against his rotundity.

"And you haven't won with either of them. The pool was pulled off by 'Highest number and above.' We happened to make a record day's run."

"Well!" said Cy, "I never set much store on omens anyway. Guess they were all right for the Ancient Greeks, but I'm too modern for them. But I can't tell you what I shall do. It will all depend on the mood I'm in when we come within smell of East River mud again."

And that was all Mr. Horrocks could get out of him. Cy had turned very queer-tempered since his accident. Perhaps the fact of being shut up in his room with only the hospital attendant as company most of the time was a trifle trying for him after being used, as he was, to being stared at, and pointed at, and talked to as one of the celebrities of the

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North Atlantic. And, moreover, his hurts kept him down below all the time they were at sea.

However, when the *Ambleside* had passed Sandy Hook, and the New York Customs' officers came on board from their tug, and went down into the saloon to make the passengers sign their declarations, in hobbled Cy on his crutches, looking very shaken and white, but with all his diamond studs and watch-chains and tie-pins in full blaze. He lowered himself down into a chair with the help of the hospital assistant, and took up a blank declaration form and a pen.

"Hullo, Cy," said the Customs' officer at the end of the table. "You back again?"

"I'm too fond of my country and too proud of her bright, cute guardians," said Cy, "to leave her shores for long."

"No, I know your little ways. Brought back anything in my line? I'd like to see the color of your money."

"Not a cent's worth," said Cy, and filled in his paper with blanks, and signed it.

"Better think again. You've a diamondiferous look about you."

"Guess I'm not going to declare wearing apparel I bought in the States, and those are about all the diamonds you'll find in my possession."

"Oh, don't let me press you any," said the Cus-

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toms' man. "I was only chucking around a pleasant hint, and if there's a funeral to follow, I guess it won't be mine."

The Purser was called away then to the Second Class, but he took it for granted that Cy would be sensible and give in, and declare his merchandise. But no such thing. And as a consequence the Customs' people opened all his trunks when they got ashore to the shed, and gave them such a searching that of course the diamonds had to turn up at last. It was only natural that this should be so, because if you start with a more or less certain foreknowledge that the thing you want is there—and it seems that the fiction writer who had next cabin to Cy let the cat out of the bag, so Captain Clayton said—it is only a case of time before you find it.

Cy, of course, was in weak health, and cursed them with viperish tongue for keeping him standing round there with aches all over him, whilst they did their tedious search. He called them all the kinds of brute that occur in America, and would really have bluffed them out of their search if they had not been so entirely sure about it. In fact he stuck out gamely till the very end. But when the hollow last was found, and the diamonds pulled out, he just broke down and crumpled up. It was quite pitiable to see him. He was crying, and sobbing, and laughing all in one, and at last the Custom House officers,

## DIAMOND CY.

out of sheer humanity, bundled him into a hack, hospital attendant and all, and told him to drive away to his hotel. They knew they could always find Cy when they wanted him, and meanwhile, of course, they held on to his unlucky parcel of diamonds.

Personally Mr. Horrocks did not pour out much unnecessary sorrow over Cy, because if you give a man a lot of sound advice, and he deliberately puts it aside and gets hurt, you naturally cannot help feeling that he should have paid more attention to your valuable words. And as for Captain Clayton, as Mr. Horrocks puts it: "He was being entertained at the Waldorf-Astoria by one of his lords and the M.P., and never gave a thought to anything as common as Cy and smuggling. He had a knack of doing quite the naval officer ashore, and you'd never have connected him with commerce. But from what came out afterwards, he might have had a bit more to do with Master Cy and his affairs than he chose to appear."

However, when the *Ambleside* had just about finished unloading, and they were beginning to work cargo in-board, a messenger came down with a note from Cy, inviting the Purser to dine with him at uptown Delmonico's. Of course, he went. Not only is the keeping on friendly terms with regular passengers one of a purser's professional assets, but Mr.

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Horrocks was a man who thoroughly appreciated a good dinner.

Ashore he practiced austerities for reasons of purse alone, and if he did violence to his palate by patronizing the baser kinds of restaurant, he solaced himself by the thought that the money so saved was more profitably employed in the up-keep of "Rock's Orphanage," an institution in which he was vitally interested.

But if Mr. Horrocks had pictured Cy as doing the honors on a couch packed with pillows, he was very decidedly mistaken. Cy was dancing about as full of activity as a be-decorated monkey, and the crutches were fantastically thrust out as ornaments amongst the flowers in the centre of the table. He had a lot more gentlemen of his own kidney in the room when Mr. Horrocks arrived, and they were roaring over a smart story in one of the evening papers. "*How the brightest Custom House officers on earth bought a sell,*" it was headed. "*All that glitters is not diamonds.*" And a bit lower was: "*Diamond Cy adds fresh laurels to his fame,*" and so on.

The Purser looked through a paragraph or so. "Look here, Cy," he said, "were those diamonds you showed me duffers?"

"You bet," said Cy cheerfully. "Best paste that's made. Cost me a Crœsus of a lot. Didn't they shine?"

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“Splendidly.”

“Those Customs’ sharks sucked them down like rye. Say, Purser, weren’t those toney tears of mine when I broke down at the—let’s see, how does the paper put it—at the disgrace and ruin of discovery?”

“But I don’t see yet how you——”

“Crutches, old man. Crutches with a hole up the middle of the shank, with the real brilliants dropped in, and set tight with glue. Crutches by themselves wouldn’t have stood a cat’s chance. But crutches, *and* an accident, *and* a hospital attendant do the thing together more in style. And then, when you plant a nice hollow last in a patent leather boot, why, there, I guess you load up the mind of any Customs’ officer that walks with all it will carry. Nothing wrong in bringing paste brilliants inside the last of a patent leather boot. No duty on them. Don’t have to declare them. Look here: the papers all say so. Lord! haven’t they been rubbing it into the New York Customs in this evening’s editions!”

“Well,” said one of the others, “if you’ve done preening yourself like an absurd peacock, Cy, what’s wrong with starting dinner? Guess we’ll get to work seriously, drinking your honored health later on.”

So they fell to and proceeded to enjoy themselves. Diamond Cy was nothing if not gorgeous, and he had

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given Delmonico's a free hand. He felt he could afford it. He had smuggled in £10,000 worth of gems free of duty, which pleased him vastly, and he had set all New York laughing at his cuteness, which pleased him far more.

Mr. Horrocks would have liked much to have fingered a share of the profits for the benefit of "Rock's Orphanage," but as a matter of fact that dinner was all he got out of the business. But he had a vague notion that Captain Clayton somehow or other fared better. Clayton looked wise, and laughed when the Purser hinted at this latter, but he said nothing. He was not a man who cared to commit himself. But Mrs. Clayton got that diamond crescent, and wore it openly in Liverpool in the daytime, and one does not see how Clayton could afford to have bought it out of his ordinary pay as Captain.

Mr. Horrocks told me that he intends to get to the bottom of that matter yet; but up to the moment of going to press he has not done so, and this tale, therefore, as regards that point, must necessarily remain incomplete.

## **The Pirate.**



# The Pirate.

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## CHAPTER I.

CAPTAIN CLAYTON rather twitted Mr. Horrocks afterwards at the ease with which the man Cragie had managed to strike up an acquaintance with him; but looking at the matter impartially, one does not see very well how it could have been avoided. It is part of a purser's professional duty to know as many people as he can possibly get at, and be liked by the highest possible percentage of them. On a little matter like this often hangs a passenger's choice between two rival steamer lines.

A purser cannot consult his own feelings on this subject. He may hate to be a humbug, but he has no remedy as long as he remains in his firm's employ. In Mr. Horrock's case there were scores of persons who said "that fat Purser is a right good sort, and I like him no end," whom he would cheerfully have seen hanged. But he had to be civil and attentive and amusing to them, and swallow all trace of dislike.

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In fact it was in a large measure for doing this that he drew his salary.

Cragie, too, knew his game, and played it like a man. He came up to the Purser when that worthy man had just looked in for his "morning" at down-town Delmonico's, and caught hold of his hand, and shook it heartily. "I'm very pleased to meet you again, Mr. Horrocks," said he. "You'll have forgotten my name, but I'm Charles L. Cragie."

Mr. Horrocks returned the hand-shake. "Ah," he said, "let me see."

"Don't apologize," said Cragie. "You'll meet some five hundred fresh faces every trip, and I know it will be hard enough to remember them, let alone the names. But don't you recollect my winning that auction sweep on the run?"

If he had asked if the Purser did not recall him through his habit of taking pepper with his vegetables, it would have been equally to the point. But it was not Mr. Horrocks' habit, for reasons already laid out, to deny acquaintanceships, so he said, in his genial way: "Oh, of course; I've got you clearly enough now," and the pair of them fell very naturally into talk.

The Purser's description of the man showed insight. "The way this Cragie lowered whiskey sours," he said, in telling of him afterwards, "made me think that his next trip would be to the Keely Cure Insti-

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tute ; but he seemed to be a man well used to business in a small way, from the glib knack he'd got of bringing figures and prices into his ordinary chatter.

“Your big business man, or your swell, or your ordinary tourist, will take a drink and stand at the bar, and just talk about the weather, or people he's met ; but fellows like this Cragie, who are as keen as knives on dollars, and not over-successful at catching them, can't help dragging money into the most ordinary conversations. They'll guess at the price of the prints behind the bar, and smack their lips over the figures, and they'll want to know how much the liquor cost a dozen before they've got a glass-full comfortably down their throats.”

Mr. Horrocks still did not remember the man in the very least. But that was nothing strange. It is a physical impossibility for a purser to keep in mind all the tens of thousands of passengers with whom he comes in official contact. However, he made out incidentally that Cragie was a man who always took one of the best rooms on the boat in which he crossed, and ran up a heavy wine bill, and was over and back between Liverpool and New York some three or four times every year. It seemed, too, he had a way of sampling all the different lines, and so Mr. Horrocks took pains to point out to him that the way to secure comfort and attention was to stick to one boat, and get known and liked on her. If he did not quite

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understand, also, that the Town Line was the smartest on the North Atlantic Ferry, and the *Ambleside* was the pick of the Town Line's fleet, it was not the fault of the *Ambleside's* Purser.

But Cragie did not accept all this without demur. "What I complain of about your Town boats," said he, "is that you're so unpunctual. You advertise you'll arrive on the 15th, say, and I cable to make my appointments accordingly; and then either you don't turn up till the 18th, and I miss a lot of business, or you have some fancy game of cutting a record and get in on the 14th, and I have a day loose on my hands, and naturally get a bit on the whiskey crawl. See what I mean?"

"Mr. Cragie, let me tell you, you never made a bigger mistake. You're thinking of the Blue Moon boats. We run like a train. We're always on schedule time."

"Well, I know the last time I crossed by one of your Town Line boats—it was the *Glasgow*, by the way—she set me down on the Liverpool stage a day and a half before time, and I can tell you it was a beastly nuisance. I'd nothing on earth to do for that time, and got on a deuce of a jamboree in consequence. Took me a matter of three days more to get straight again, and so I lost four-and-a-half days' business all through your fault."

"It might be an interesting case for the Courts,

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but I don't think you'd get compensation from our Company over that."

Mr. Cragie grinned. "Oh, I know my way about. But it's a fact she did come in sooner than I'd reckoned on, and I'd got a time-table from a tourist bureau to make sure of the date."

"There you are, then. Why don't you go to headquarters for what you want? We don't guarantee any time-table except our own: in fact, most of them are inaccurate. We give out a list of approximate departures and arrivals at the beginning of the year, but circumstances often arrive which make us modify them."

"I see. Your directors suddenly get up a notion they'd like to try and break a record with one of your boats for the sake of the extra advertisement, and so put more coal on board, and let the old time-table go hang. But where's one to find out about that?"

"At our own office right here in New York. Where else? They're always delighted to give any information to passengers."

"I see. And could they tell me the exact dates when you sail with the *Ambleside*, and when you arrive?"

"Of course. But I can do that myself if you want it. To-day is Friday. We pull out from here next Tuesday at 1.30 middle day, and put you in the London train at Liverpool at 3 o'clock in the afternoon

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of Wednesday week. Run you up to town in time for a theatre."

"Or breakfast the next morning, which?"

"Exactly as I have said."

"Will you bet on it? Will you bet you don't vary six hours on either side of that time?"

The Purser stared at the man curiously. His face was working with excitement. There seemed to be something out of balance here. Why should it matter to Mr. Cragie so vastly whether the *Ambleside* ran on schedule time or not?

"You seem very keen on it," said Mr. Horrocks. "By the way, I forgot to ask. Are you crossing by us?"

"No, I'm sorry, but you won't get there till too late for me. I must take to-morrow's boat. But about that bet. Is it on? Look here. I'll lay you five to three in thousand dollar bills you're not there within eight hours of the time you mentioned."

"I'm not a gambler," said the Purser, "and, moreover, I'm a man with very little loose cash. But I'll take you in hundreds."

Cragie's excitement grew. His face was white and sweating. He was bending up an ash-tray in his fingers till the barman took it away. "Look here," he snarled, "you're trying to get out of it. If your old boat's worth a copper for reliability, the money'd

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have been a cert to you, and you'd have snapped up the bet like winking."

The Purser tried to puzzle out what the man's motive might be in all this violence. Was this Cragie trying to fasten a quarrel on him? Mr. Horrocks had every intention of avoiding that. He was not a man who saw any amusement in a fracas with an ex-passenger in a public barroom. He was always majestically conscious of the reputation he had to keep up. So he gave a fat, easy laugh, and pretended not to see that there was anything wrong. "My dear Mr. Cragie," he said, "I have not the smallest idea of losing three hundred dollars to you, and your five is as good as earned for me if you persist in making the bet."

"Persist!" shouted the man. "This will show you whether I persist!" He lugged out a pocketbook and thumbed five hundred-dollar bills. He slammed them noisily down on to the counter. "Now!" he cried, "dare you take those, with the barman here for a witness?"

"Certainly, my dear sir." Mr. Horrocks doubled the notes neatly and slipped them into a pocket over one of his curves. "And if the *Ambleside* fails to get in at the time I said, why then I shall owe you eight hundred."

"You're beginning to see yourself paying it already."

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"If I thought there was the smallest likelihood of that, you would not have noticed me pick up your money. I didn't want to bet with you, because I've been taught it's wrong to bet on a certainty, but as you insisted, well, I guess it's your funeral."

"Have another drink on that?"

"No, I should say we've both about had our load. Besides, I've to go back to the office again." So there they parted.

The Purser stumbled across Captain Clayton getting out of a Broadway cable-car half-an-hour afterwards, and it struck him that it would not be a bad thing to underwrite part of his risk. So he told him about Cragie and his bet. "I suppose it's a safe enough thing, Captain?" said he.

Captain Clayton licked a leaf that was loose on the end of his cigar, and shut one eye thoughtfully. "Delays might happen, of course. And, on the other hand, old McDraw might by accident burn fifty tons of coal too much, and get her there before time, unless I gave him word to keep on the normal. And then there's Queenstown. It's a ticklish job getting off your mails at Queenstown, and time's very easily picked up there—or dropped. How much was it you said you stood to win over this little game, Horrocks?"

The Purser laughed. "Look here," he said, "I'm open to betting you two hundred to fifty you don't get her in on time. Here's two hundred."

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Captain Clayton winked pleasantly, and put the notes in his pocket. "After all, why shouldn't I have a share? I'm the man who will really do the winning. You merely stand by to pouch the result."

"Well, don't lose, that's all. I don't want to pay Cragie."

"And I don't want to pay you. Which way are you going? Back to the office? Well, I'm just going in here to buy a tie, and then I'm off to the Fifth Avenue for a luncheon. So long."

The *Ambleside*, thanks to Mr. Horrocks' personality and exertions, was always a popular boat, but that return trip she was exceptionally full. A great exhibition on the Continent of Europe was drawing Americans sightseers across the Atlantic, and berths were booked weeks beforehand. On the *Ambleside* their first-class passengers had overflowed into the second-class rooms, of course at unreduced fares, and, moreover, express freights were exceptionally good just then, and she was loaded down to her marks. The dividends on the run would be princely, and Mr. Horrocks thought that, under the circumstances, the Board could scarcely avoid seeing what an excellent servant they had in him, and would raise his salary there and then by way of cementing his connection with the line.

Mr. Horrocks was badly in need of additional funds

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just then. The orphanage which he ran in a Cheshire village under the pseudonym of "Mr. Rocks," was draining his resources to the uttermost copper. In a moment of exceptional prosperity he had built on a new wing, opened it himself with a thrill of pompousness and pride, and then, with all his feelings of humanity aroused, bought and stole wretched waifs from the Liverpool slums to people it.

He had promised himself that the additional mouths should be filled somehow; and that he would make money to pay the increasing bills by getting hold of extra "pickings," or from increase of salary, which he felt that the Town S.S. Co. could not much longer withhold from him. But the pickings evaded his keen grasp, and, though surely no purser ever worked more diligently in a firm's interest, his salary remained stationary.

In this particular voyage, then, of the *Ambleside*, he saw possibilities of profit for the company and advertisement for the Line, and intended to push both to the furthest limit. Never should there be such a happy, contented crowd of passengers; never should the wine bills be so big; and if Rocks' Orphanage did not come by its due reward, well, Mr. Horrocks felt that Providence would scarcely be giving proper attention to its legitimate business.

But in an ocean voyage there are infinite possibilities, and it is the unforeseen which usually trips the

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modern mariner. With the high scientific appliances of these latter days, the sounding machines, the Thompson's compasses, and all the other perfect utensils of navigation, it is seldom that, on the known routes, a well-found liner is cast away, either through fog, current, or bitter gale. She is driven full speed ahead through whatever weather is sent down upon the seas, and, though her officers may suffer from strain and exposure, she runs between her ports with the regularity of a railway train. Her vital point is in the engine-room. No amount of outlay and care make boilers and steam-pipes and machinery absolutely infallible.

So it came to pass that on the morning of the fourth day out of New York, instead of the passengers being awakened by nimble bedroom stewards carrying biscuits and well-boiled tea, a sudden *rump, bump, whizz* of the engines brought them into sharp wakefulness. Then, for a second or two more, there was an uncanny grinding, which some half-dozen observers said reminded them of the crepitation of a broken bone, and then the engines stopped, and a new sound of waves slapping against the steamer's flanks took the place of the *swish-h-h* of rapid transit. The passengers turned out from their bedplaces, and began hurriedly to dress.

Then upon the scene appeared the burly form of the Purser, giving instructions to the stewards with

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tongue, elbow, and hand. The stewards, being human, were as much startled as everyone else, and wanted to go on deck and see for themselves what was the matter. But Mr. Horrocks soon brought them back to routine.

“Away with you, now, and see to your rooms. You can pass the word it’s only a broken shaft, and we’ll soon have that fixed up. Nothing in a broken shaft. And breakfast’s at the usual time. No alteration in anything. Oh, yes, and it’s fine weather on deck, but rather cold.”

The stewards spread the placid message. Mr. Horrock’s diagnosis was guess-work, of course, but it happened to be correct, and presently news was brought down to this effect. The passengers, after the first shock of alarm, were disposed to take things coolly enough, and the stout Purser went round from room to room paying early morning calls with easy familiarity. There was not the least occasion for alarm. Already a steamer had come up to their assistance, and arrangements were being made for towing. They might be a few days late in arriving, but as for safety, they stood a precious sight less chance of danger on the *Ambleside* than they did ashore with all those nasty cab-accidents, and gas explosions, and earthquakes knocking about.

The Purser found opportunity for going on deck presently and found the *Ambleside* looking much as

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usual, except that she sat down rather emphatically on her tail, and had her bows rather further out of the water than seemed quite necessary. McDraw, the Chief Engineer, came up from below about the same time, and trotted briskly towards the upper bridge ladder, exuding a thin stream of dirty water from his clothes as he ran.

Mr. Horrocks would have liked much to follow him, but he knew that on these occasions a purser, be he ever so magnificent, is apt to be snubbed by the executive. So he planted himself at a point where Captain Clayton could not fail to see him, and waited for an invitation. In the meanwhile he could clearly hear the old Chief make his report.

“I was in my berth when it happened. She runs that sweetly there’s vara sma’ occasion for me to turn oot every watch. Besides, I’ve three good watch officers that I’d trust to tend her as weel as you or mysel’. It was my Senior Second’s watch when it happened, an’ he reports to me he heard the shaft break with a gr-reat noise, and that the bedplates buckled and knocked him over. She raced a bit before he could get her throttled down. But there’s naething broken in the engine-room. They’re graand engines, thanks to the care that’s been given them. There was water coming in pretty free from the shaft tunnel, so I dropped down the slide door mysel’ and cut

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it off. Ye'll mind that slide operates from the top platform?"

"Yes, yes," said Clayton. "But is the smash past repair? You carry a spare section of shafting; can't you fit that in? You say your engines are all sound. Can't the break be got at? Is it the tail shaft or where?"

"Tail shaft or intermediate. I neither know, nor does it matter. The shaft tunnel's pairt an' parcel o' the broad Atlantic just noo, an' it's my belief that when the shaft went jimmy, it peeled off a square fathom or two of plating as remembrancer. Our future help cometh fra' the Lord, Captain, an' fra' yonder steamboat He has sent with a tow-rope stick-ing out of her rump. My engines do no more work till we've been through a dry dock."

"I see you're blowing off steam."

"All but what's wanted for ma bilge pumps. There's a good sup o' water come through into my engine-room before the shaft tunnel was shut off. But we're getting it under nicely. I shall set my chaps on to tallow down the main engines when they're cool."

"Very well," said Clayton shortly, "that will do," and as McDraw went down off the bridge, he beckoned the Purser up. "That old fool's philosophy jars on me a bit just now, Horrocks," he said.

"I don't think the philosophy is more than skin-

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deep, sir," said Horrocks. "His eyes were full of tears when he came down the ladder. Anything wrong with McDraw's engines goes very near to McDraw's best feelings. At a rough guess, I should say he feels this mess-up more than any of us, and that's saying a good deal, because, personally speaking, it seems I shall be due to pay \$300 hard cash, not to mention handing back \$500 I've pouched already. Heaven knows where I'm to find it."

"I shall owe you \$250, too, and I'm afraid you'll have to wait for it. We're that hard up at home I hardly know how to turn. My wife, poor girl, and her sisters, are always dinning into me that I ought to make more, and I suppose they're right. But this job here doesn't look like doing it. Probably all the officers in the ship will get reduced or fired over this smash."

"Probably," said the Purser gloomily. "That's our Mr. William Arthur's way. He thinks that if you sack officers every time one of your boats has a smash, you don't have so many smashes."

"In a way he's right."

"Our Mr. William Arthur's a splendid man of business," said the Purser, with reluctant admiration. "He always makes a point of hanging somebody if anything goes wrong. Pity they don't try that game in the Navy."

"You let the Navy alone, please, Mr. Horrocks,"

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said Clayton, with sudden temper, and the Purser civilly said "Yes sir," and remembered too late that Clayton was an R.N.R. man, and absurdly touchy about the prestige of his service. "That steamboat that's coming up looks to me like an old tramp. Not likely to be of much use to us, sir."

"Two thousand five hundred tons," said Clayton, looking at the oncoming steamer, "and if she isn't exactly flying light, she's precious little cargo in her. Just enough coal to see her home, and not even enough over to fire the bogie in the forecastle. She'll offer to report us."

"Then there'll be some big gambling amongst the under-writers when she does get in. I suppose with all this mob of passengers, we'll be worth a million."

"All that," Clayton admitted. "I wonder," he said drearily, "will we be picked up? We're in the steam lane now, but the weather's not over clear, and we may drift out of it in a day."

"Every steamboat in the North Atlantic will be on the look-out for us, if we aren't picked up inside of a week. We're not a poor wind-jammer or an old tramp. We're far too valuable a plum to be neglected."

"Well, you can impress on the passengers that we shan't sink, whatever the weather is that comes, that's one comfort."

"And we shan't starve, notwithstanding the crowd

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on board, under a month and a week at full rations. That's the blessing of one of the Company's grandmotherly regulations about carrying extra stores. I used to think it a fool regulation before."

Captain Clayton was watching the other steamer, which was just being brought to a standstill alongside. "By Jove, Purser, but the skipper of that old water-pusher yonder handles her smartly. What steamer is that?" he hailed. "This is the *Ambleside*, Captain Clayton."

"*Coronet*, of Withby, Captain Crump, New York to Liverpool in ballast. You're a goodish bit by the stern, Captain. Have you happened an accident? Can I give you a pluck in anywhere?"

"Broken shaft. But if you're going homewards you'll not have coal sufficient to tow us."

"Got coal enough to tow you to St. Petersburg, Captain," shouted the man, and was instantly checked by a companion who was with him on the tramp's bridge. The pair of them had some hasty talk, which could not be heard from the liner, and then in a grumbling tone, he sang out: "Well, anyway, I've enough coal to pull you into Queenstown, and I guess that'll be all you'll want. Now how much am I going to get for my salvage?"

"No use our going into that," Clayton hailed back. "Whatever bargain you and I made, the courts would

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be called in ashore to settle up the figure. If you think you can tow, the sooner you get started, the better for both parties. If not, there's a Blue Moon freight boat due here in about half-a-dozen hours. We're right on her track."

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### CHAPTER II.

FROM the *Ambleside* they saw Captain Crump's companion seize him excitedly by the arm, and Captain Crump impatiently turn to listen to another conversation which was beyond their earshot. "Well, I've said I'm quite ready to tow you," he bawled at length. "Will you send me your rope? And say, I've a new thick wire that will most probably beat anything you've aboard there for towing. We'll want something that'll hold presently. I see the glass is falling, and there's a breeze coming away. We shall put a big strain on what we tow by."

The tramp steamer began to bustle with ragged men and the yell of orders. The liner preserved her dignity even in this time of stress. With her abundant officers, there was at least one to look after each knot of working seamen, and as all were highly skilled specialists in their profession, each knew exactly what to do, and was ready at the least nod or gesture of a superior to do it.

The passengers had turned out by this time, and were watching anxiously. The lack of noise or bus-

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tle impressed them. They saw a lifeboat, manned by a life-belted crew, drop from the davits and become the plaything of violent green waves. Oars straggled out from her sides, and she crept away over the shifting hill and dale of ocean, and the passengers felt comfortable and secure through contrast between their own ease and that of the men who were carrying the line across to the rescuing steamer.

Mr. Horrocks drew a happy parallel. "Looks small, doesn't she, that lifeboat? But let me tell you she's more tonnage than the packets that Columbus and the Pilgrim Fathers and those old people used to cross in. Let me tell you, too, you're still in luck's way for comfort here on the old *Ambleside*, even if she has chanced to stumble on a bit of an accident. If she'd been one of those light-plated foreign boats, or one of the other lines I could mention out of Liverpool—you'd all be swimming this minute, or drowned. It's only a stout-built boat like this that could have stood the shock she's had. But as it is, things'll go on just the same as usual, except that I'm afraid there won't be strawberries down on the menu every day for dessert. I'll own up frankly we may run a bit short of strawberries. But there's lashings of everything else—including breakfast, which is now ready. I say, good people, the gong's gone for breakfast. Am I going to eat it down there all by myself?"

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The more hardened of the passengers went down to breakfast; the more curious, and the few who were nervous, missed that meal and watched on whilst the *Coronet* steamed ahead, and tautened on the wire till the heavy liner surged along reluctantly in her wake. They were annoyed, many of them, at being made to miss some of their appointments in England and Europe; they were madly thrilled, some of them, at being on a steamer that had "broken down" in mid-Atlantic, but none of them were in the least degree terrified, which speaks a good deal for the consistent teaching of Mr. Horrocks on the text of "Nothing could sink in the *Ambleside*."

Mr. Horrocks himself, however, was the uneasy man; and deep down in his massive breast there smouldered a suspicion that this mishap which had befallen the *Ambleside* had been invited in some considerable measure by his own thoughtless act. It was only a suspicion, to be sure, because he could not be certain that it was his acquaintance, Mr. Cragie, he had seen prompting the tramp steamer's skipper on her bridge.

The man had worn a peaked cap drawn down well over his eyes, and a muffler pulled up high above the collar of his coat. He was all but unrecognizable, —still, there was a something about him which tried hard to betray his identity, some small characteristic trait which could not be eliminated by disguise, and

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the Purser hung about the decks glaring through a pair of binoculars, trying to make suspicion into a certainty.

In lesser degree Clayton and McDraw also had the glimmerings of uneasy theories that the *Ambleside* had not come by her ailment merely by unaided chance; and though each had so slender a groundwork for the idea that he was afraid to share it for fear of ridicule, each hammered at his clue with a mind that was savagely eager for retaliation.

But it was the Purser who finally brought together the threads of suspicion into something that the three of them were pleased to consider certainty. Cold head gales and heavy seas made the towing tedious, and the weather bitter wet. But Mr. Horrocks exposed his portly form to the elements, though he had all a purser's preference for the warmth and comfort of the smoke-room and saloons, and sought across the tumbling seas for a sight of Cragie somewhere on the other steamer. And at last he was rewarded. Cragie appeared on the *Coronet*'s poop, unmuffled and plain for all to see.

The day was thick with driving sleet, and except for the officers and men of the watch, the *Ambleside*'s decks seemed deserted, and Mr. Horrocks was chilled and moist. But a glow went through him when he thought he saw a way of handing along those pocketed dollars to Rock's Orphanage after all, and he

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stepped briskly up to the chart house to lay his suggestion in the proper quarter.

He was bidden to come in in answer to his knock, and found there Captain Clayton in conference with his chief engineer.

“Well, Purser?”

“You remember that bet I told you about in New York, sir, with a person who said his name was Cragie?”

“Worse luck, yes.”

“Well, Cragie excused himself from crossing with us, sir, because he said we should land in Liverpool too late for his business; said he’d have to take the *Blue Moon* boat, which sailed three days earlier.”

“I remember.”

“It seems Cragie lied. He’s on that old tramp that’s got hold of us ahead. You’ll remember a man on the bridge prompting her skipper when he first hailed you? I’d my suspicions of him then. I’ve been watching for him ever since. He’s been keeping very carefully out of the way. But just now I’ve seen him staring at us from the poop—gloating over his catch, I should say he was—and I’d swear to him anywhere.”

“Yes?”

“What I want to know now, sir, is, first, why did Cragie force that bet on me, and second, why’s he here?”

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“Hear, hear,” said Clayton, and thumped his fist on the chart-house table. “And what I want to know is, why’s that tramp’s skipper got more coal in his bunkers than’s enough to carry him home? He’s coming from New York, where steam coal’s dear, to Liverpool, where it’s cheap. It’s contrary to reason that he should carry more back than would see him across. And there’s another point. What did he bring along that hawser for that he’s so keen on our using to tow with? It’s brand-new, it’s out of the way thick, and let me tell you it’s an expensive length of rope. We’re about as well fit out here on the *Ambleside* as any boat I was ever on. I’m denied nothing for her by the shore superintendent that my Chief Officer cares to indent for, but we don’t carry a wire like that. And yet this rotten old tramp comes along with a coil in her boatswain’s store all handy and useful.

“Both that and the coal are bang in the face of probability, but I’ll not say they mightn’t happen singly. There are amazing fools in this world. But when they come both together as they do here, it’s clean past foolishness, and gets into a kind of superior wisdom that seems to spell something very like knavery. What do you say, Purser?”

“Looks to me, sir, as if somebody must have figured out this breakdown to a tolerable certainty. It may be Crump, it may be Cragie, or it may be some-

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one else, but I put my money on Cragie all the time. This *Coronet's* pace isn't anywhere equal to ours; she must have started at least two days ahead to meet us where she did, and yet, as we saw for ourselves, she came up out of the sea at the exact moment when we broke down, all ready and hungry to lick up the salvage. We're a big thing to go for."

"The fattest there's been floating about this Western Ocean this ten years," said Clayton.

"The only thing where the plan doesn't seem to hang together's here. If Crump and Cragie brought out the *Coronet* to pick us up at a given spot in the N. Atlantic Ocean, how the blazes did they know we'd be kind enough to break down there? I'm no mechanic, but I should say you can't figure out the breaking moment of a shaft by a rule of three sum. What do you say, Mr. McDraw?"

"I say, sirs, that I'm vara pleased to hear your theories," said the old man.

"Yes, yes," said Clayton testily. "But we haven't got at anything tangible so far."

"I was going to obsairve," said the Chief Engineer, "that I've theories o' my ain, scores of them, but till now I've kept them to mysel'. We're a cautious nation where I come frae, Captain Clayton, and no' wishfu' to be heckled at for ower imagination."

"You've quite a reputation for it."

"Aweel, my chief second, that was on watch when

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the accident happened, put a tale into my ear about guncotton. Says he: 'Mr. McDraw, there was gun-cotton fired in that shaft tunnel to cause the break.' 'Stuff,' said I, not because I misbelieved him, seeing that he's a countryman o' my own, an' no gifted wi' imagination, but merely to hear his further arguments. 'I know what I talk about,' says he. 'When I was in the Chilian Navy I kenned fine the smell of fired guncotton an' its pheesical effects.' 'Then why,' said I, 'did I no catch the stench of it mysel'?' 'Because,' says he, 'when you came to the engine-room the shaft-tunnel was pouring out sea water like a six-foot sewer, and you were ower thronged wi' screwing down the slide door to think about a trifle o' bookay.' "

"It's beginning to fit together," said the Purser.

"But ye've no real evidence," said McDraw.

"We shall have to wait till the boat's dry-docked," said Clayton. "If there's been guncotton used, the marks should show plainly enough then."

"I'll no' think it," said McDraw. "Ye see it's this way. A sma' charge is all that's needed. Once you lift or depress a revolving shaft an inch or so out of the true, it does all the rest of the breaking for itself. It so to speak threshes round and devastates the surrounding scenery, if one may use a poetic seemily; and my notion is that when she's docked,

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we shall find that the hinder end of the boat has been bashed clean to jimmy."

"That seems to knock on the head all question of definite proof," said Clayton gloomily. "The most we seem to get at is what the Board will call 'Negligence on the part of the Chief Engineer in not having the shaft-tunnel more carefully inspected.' "

"I'd thought of that same mysel'," said McDraw drily, "and it made me chary about speaking about the matter, except as I am doing now without prejudice and amang friends. Ye'll note I'm just talking to Clayton and Horrocks. In my formal report of the matter to Captain Clayton, I wrote what I knew and could see, not what I might guess. I'd in mind that the Town S.S. Company underwrite most of their boats' risk in their ain office, and will have to pay for most of the cost of salving us out of their ain pockets."

"Our Mr. William Arthur's bound to take it out of some of us if he has to fork up," said the Purser. "But at the same time if we can so contrive that there's no bill sent in for this bit of salvage, he'll be content not to ask too many questions. He's a splendid man of business. And he's not ungrateful; he'd certainly give us a rise all round if it came off."

"Well?" said Clayton.

"I'm quite satisfied with what we've found out as a start. Remember that Cragie didn't go into this

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business without quite convincing himself that he could carry it through without being dropped on. He's made one or two trifling mistakes which we've got hold of, and we flatter oursel's we've pieced together more or less of the whole yarn. We haven't done that yet. For instance, we haven't yet found out how the guncotton was worked. Was it put aboard in New York, with a clock-work 'devil' wound up to set it off at the right time? Hardly, I think. Has Cragie an accomplice in one of our greasers or stoke-hold hands who could slip the thing in place with a time-fuse at the right moment? Can't say. But I believe I know who can tell, and we'd do best to go to the fountain head."

"Meaning Cragie?" said Clayton.

"Yes."

"But he wouldn't speak."

"He would if he was made."

Captain Clayton drew a long breath. "And we three call ourselves respectable men!"

"Yes," said Horrocks, "and I personally should continue to do so after this little event. I don't advocate putting Mr. Cragie to the question in the public streets. I should suggest a private room, a pair of irons, a handkerchief to stuff in his mouth, so that he couldn't squall, a fire lit in the grate, and a poker between the bars. I believe he'd weaken when he saw we meant business, and if he didn't—

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well, so much the worse for him. We should have to see it through."

"He doesn't deserve gentle treatment, certainly."

"The man's a common pirate, no less, and he must take what treatment he can get. We don't want vengeance so much as our own profit. I should say our best way would be to compound with him. He must guarantee not to take a penny in salvage from the company and we'll give him a promise not to prosecute."

"That seems all right," said Clayton. "And the bets are to be cancelled? I simply can't pay out that \$250 for the moment."

"Well," said Mr. Horrocks, "I should say that the money which has been passed already should be retained by present holders by way of a fine."

"It seems to me," said McDraw, "you're going ahead ower fast. First catch your hare."

"I can't afford to let him slip," said Mr. Horrocks. "You may think me a savage over what I've proposed, but I've my reasons for it."—"Any living creature can be a savage," he told himself, "when it is defending its young." And it seemed to him he had either to defeat Cragie, or be content to be mulcted and see Rocks' Orphanage suffer.

Indeed, in all this business which followed, the stout Purser was undoubtedly the moving spirit. It was he who waylaid Cragie in Liverpool, pretending

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to have known nothing of his having crossed by the *Coronet*, but letting the man suppose he took it for granted he was one of the last Blue Moon boat's passengers. It was he who callously betrayed the man with drink, lured him to a room in lodgings where no questions would be asked, left him in irons to become sober and nervous, and then brought up the Captain and Engineer to add to his informal court.

Cragie's boots were stripped off and the soles of his feet bared; a handkerchief was tied over his mouth so that he could not make outcry, and the poker was taken red-hot from the glow of the fire. The points of the count against him were recapitulated one by one, and he was invited to fill in some of the blanks. They did not want full confession from him; they did not want him to inculpate anybody else; but they desired a written assurance that he would not prefer any salvage claim against the Town S.S. Co. on account of their liner the *Ambleside*, and, failing that document, they were prepared to make a certain unpleasant union between the red-hot poker and part of his anatomy.

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Now the exact manner of Mr. Cragie's subjugation is hidden from me, as Mr. Horrocks flatly refuses to dilate upon it. But that a full and satisfactory document was left behind when the man limped out of

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the room, I do know, and I have it also on good authority that the three who were left felt sick and shaken, and went out to the nearest licensed house for brandy.

As for Cragie, it does not seem that he deserves much pity. He was merely a vulgar pirate, the lineal business descendant of those broad-buckled, many-pistolled rascals that our grandparents used to hang in chains, when caught, with a coating of tar as a preservative. And really, on the other hand, Rocks' Orphanage, whatever be the value of the mixed motives of its founder and patron, is an institution which does a considerable amount of good.

The redoubtable Mr. William Arthur probably felt surprised when so fat a claim for salvage was limply withdrawn. But he expressed no regret, and he was too good a man of business to exhibit surprise. He even, on a hint being given him, forebore to ask unnecessary questions, but stuck to the steamer's dry routine, and discovered that her Captain, Purser, and Chief Engineer had behaved exceptionally well under very trying circumstances.

It was not the custom of the Firm to make promotions from boats which had met with bad luck; but the *Ambleside* would have to be laid up some time for repairs, and he did not intend to have any of the Firm's servants drawing pay for no work. So as

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a new boat had just been added to the line, they could go and run her. She was bigger than the *Ambleside*, and they were going to christen her the *Leeds*. Oh, yes, and pay would be in proportion to tonnage. Good morning!

# **The Greatest Pianist.**



# The Greatest Pianist.

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## CHAPTER I.

“NEVER heard of him before, sir,” said Mr. Horrocks, the Purser.

“Why, he’s the greatest musician in the world,” said Captain Clayton.

“Did he tell you so himself?” asked Mr. Horrocks, “or did you read that on one of his handbills?”

“Pooh, Janocky is not the man to advertise.”

“Then he’s the first theatrical I ever came across who didn’t.”

“I tell you the man’s not a theatrical, Horrocks. He’s a pianist, and the *Leeds* is honored in having him for a passenger.”

“Never knew any pro. yet bring either honor or profit to any boat,” said the Purser stubbornly.

Mr. Horrocks was a fellow of infinite tact to passengers, but deep within his rotund exterior, and kept there solely for private consumption, was an as-

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sortment of very violent prejudices. And of all his strong dislikes, actors, actresses, musicians, and all those who made a livelihood by tickling the ears of the public held an easy first place.

Captain Clayton, however, who had married a wife from the stage, naturally looked upon the class from a different standpoint. He said rather sharply that they must take care that Janocky was given a good room.

“Certainly, sir. Of course, if you think a good deal of attention ought to be given him, the greatest compliment would be to let him have your room.” Mr. Horrocks knew quite well that the Captain had let his own room to a Californian millionaire at an exorbitant fee, and would, as usual, take up his quarters in the chart-house; and, moreover, Captain Clayton was quite aware that his stout purser knew this.

“That’s not convenient. He must have one of the best of the ordinary passengers’ rooms.”

“He shall, sir, you may depend upon me. I will see from his ticket what passage money was paid, and he shall have the best we ever do for the price.” Which, being interpreted, meant that Mr. Horrocks would give the pianist exactly the type of cabin he paid for, and no more. Indeed, if he had only paid for a single berth, the Purser was firmly determined that he should have a stable companion. The ship would be full enough to arrange this easily.

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Captain Clayton knew that the Purser was practically supreme in these matters, and did not intend to give way, and made a mental note that Mr. Horrocks had not given up his habit of making repayment for value received. Some little while before, he had stopped the Purser from pocketing a commission which that worthy man considered a lawful perquisite. He now understood why at times it is advisable that shipmasters should wink at some of the habits of pursers.

“Of course, you’d like to have this Mr. John-what’s his-name at your table, sir?”

“Yes,” said Clayton, and sharply changed the conversation.

Now Mr. Horrocks explained his distaste for theatrical people as due to several things. As he viewed them, their excessive vanity gave him nausea; they always wanted better rooms than they were entitled to, and paid the lowest possible rates of fare; they sponged on the other passengers, and were always on the look-out to create scandals. And finally, he was bound to be civil to them, as they were always “in” with the gentlemen of the Press ashore, and, if they were not satisfied, had it in their power to get the boat a heavy adverse advertisement. As an inspirer of the Press himself, Mr. Horrocks thoroughly understood how this was managed.

Herr Janocky earned the Purser’s detestation from

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the very first moment of meeting. The great pianist showed a vague, absent manner which Mr. Horrocks put down to unadulterated affectation. His pale face, which admirers went into raptures over, struck this critic as merely bilious. His Papuan-like mass of untidy hair seemed to the Purser (who was close-cropped himself) nothing more nor less than a display advertisement, and a very nasty one at that.

Promptly also from the moment of their general recovery from sea-sickness—which took place after leaving Queenstown—thanks to Janocky, the first-class passengers of the *Leeds* were divided into two violently opposing cliques. A move had been made by an ardent spirit named Pitcairn towards getting up the usual concert in aid of the Sailors' Orphan home. The usual list of amateurs were available, and Pitcairn made up a pleasantly assorted programme. But he was a man with ambition. He wanted Janocky to "do a turn."

He mentioned this to Mr. Horrocks, and suggested that that great man should formulate the wishes of the passengers to the pianist.

"I'll see you in—melted first. Go and ask him yourself. You aren't shy."

"Oh, but aren't I?"

"Never knew but one drummer yet who was, and he didn't come from Bradford. But if you are scared of Mop-head himself, go to White, his agent."

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“Which might White be?”

“That little black chap with the clothes that fit too well, and the diamonds.”

“Oh, I know. Or I might get the Skipper to ask him.”

“Great thought,” said Mr. Horrocks, “I’d do it.”

“I will,” said Pitcairn, and he did.

Now Captain Clayton had no mean opinion of the position held by the commander of a crack Atlantic liner, especially if the letters R.N.R. stood after his name, and the corresponding blue ensign fluttered from the liner’s poop-staff. Moreover, by reason of his own connection with the stage, he felt that if the request came from him, it was certain to be granted; and he said as much.

As a consequence, when, with a good deal of unnecessary offensiveness, Janocky refused flatly to play on anything so commonplace as a steamer’s piano, for a mere steamer’s audience, Captain Clayton felt the slight pretty keenly. “You should not have come to me with a request like that,” said the pianist, by way of winding up his refusal. “You should have approached my agent.”

As this little scene occurred in Pitcairn’s hearing, a full account of it was quickly common property, and, as I say, the first-class passengers of the *Leeds* were forthwith split up into two strongly antagonistic bodies. About one-half of them chose to regard

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Janocky as a Heaven-sent artist, and as something more than human, and these quite approved of his attitude, said that the Captain ought to have known better than to make such a proposal to him, and that to ask him to play on an instrument like the saloon grand (which was not by his own favorite maker), and before an audience that tolerated comic songs and amateur recitations, was nothing short of a gratuitous insult. This party numbered in its ranks most of the ladies amongst the passengers, and as some slight reward for their adoration and loyalty, they prayed Janocky for autographs and locks of his hair and other keepsakes.

They found out that Janocky was a son of one of the oldest houses in Russia, and they raved about his high descent, his sublime art and his personal appearance rather more than was perhaps judicious in the face of such a strong opposition.

The other party, who had, perhaps, more humor about them, possessed an equal command of language. They described Janocky as a more-or-less-strongly-qualified mountebank, and analyzed his "antics" unkindly. They admitted that they might be Philistines, since, according to history, that nation had always held Jews at large in detestation—although Russian Jews are not particularly mentioned in the record. But at the same time they openly confessed their admiration for the pianist's advertising

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skill, and with mock solemnity formed a syndicate for taking over a certain patent medicine factory in the States, on condition that they could obtain the services of Janocky as manager, to push the sale of the company's pills.

It was into the ranks of this clique that Pitcairn endeavored to enlist the active assistance of Mr. Horrocks; but that wily man, though the direction of his sympathies may be guessed, naturally could not become an open partisan.

“Look here,” he said, “you go to commercial-travel Bradford goods in the States. Would you go and mortally offend one-half of your customers at the expense of the others? Not much. Well, I guess you may look upon the passengers here as my customers. Somebody’s set them by the ears enough already without my chipping in to help.”

“But we’ve got a great game on, and we want somebody in authority to bear a bit of a hand.”

“I daresay you do. Suppose you think it would be a sort of poetical justice if one of the officers decorated Janocky’s flowing locks with a fool’s cap.”

“That’s about the idea.”

The Purser laid a fat hand on Pitcairn’s shoulder, “You go and try the Skipper, my son.”

“Shy.”

“Oh, get on! You know him well enough.”

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“I’ve crossed with Clayton twenty-three times for the matter of that. In fact, I seem to know him a bit too well. If we were less intimate, he might see his way to being more civil. As it is, he snaps my head off when I so much as breathe the name of the great Janocky.”

“Well,” said the Purser, “if you’ve an ounce of sense you’ll see which way the cat jumps, and you’ll let things gently simmer down. If you go on, you’ll probably get your fingers burned.” With which he left Pitcairn, and made a mental note to watch the welfare of Herr Janocky with some tenderness. For the pianist’s own personal feelings he did not care one rap. Once ashore he would be quite pleased to hear the man had been brought to derision; but the reputation of the *Leeds* was a matter which touched Mr. Horrocks intimately, and he did not intend that this should be smirched by any outrageous pranks on Janocky, which he felt sure that objectionable person would wrest round into an advertisement.

As he put it afterwards: “You see I knew the crowd. They were men, most of them, up to the neck in business ashore, and the time they were at sea was sheer holiday to them, and they’d go mad on anything that would help to fill in the time, and give them something to plan and think about. In fact, they were as ripe for mischief as any pack of schoolboys.”

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However, except that the nickname of The Pill-maker was given to Janocky, and bandied about delightedly by the opposition, no more active scheme of annoyance was invented ; and if it had not been for the injudicious adulation of the pianist's admirers, Mr. Horrocks was satisfied that the incident would have been allowed to drop. But to see the man openly adored by all the women passengers, and fawned on by a section of the men, was obviously a deliberate exasperation for those who were out of sympathy with him, and the Purser, though he carried an indifferent face, stood by anxiously on guard.

The *Leeds* was exactly in mid-Atlantic when the explosion came, and matters at once assumed a very serious complexion. The news spread amongst the first-class passengers like fire on a gunpowder train, but Mr. Horrocks did not hear it at once. He was arbitrating in the Third Class between two non-English speaking emigrants, each of whom accused the other of theft, and had patiently expended half-an-hour in the endeavor to arrive at a just settlement. But when a peremptory message came from Captain Clayton that he should go up to the chart-house at once, he adjourned his arbitration by clapping both emigrants in irons and ordering a thorough search of their effects. It is a recognized law on liners that the amount of attention received by each passenger

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from the officials varies directly in the ratio of the fares paid to the Company.

“You’ve heard what’s happened to Janocky?” demanded Clayton.

“No, sir,” said the Purser formally. He was always formal with his Captain when he scented trouble. Afterwards, when hard words had passed, and the matter had been settled up, they could drop their official relations again, and become intimates once more in the space of a sentence.

“Then, Mr. Horrocks, let me tell you it is your business to have heard. You are here to prevent trouble amongst the passengers. And as it is, this scandal is all over the ship now.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, if you don’t know,” said Clayton angrily, “what’s happened is this——” But at that moment the door opened, and in came the pianist himself.

“I understand,” he said, “that my agent, Mr. White, gave you some account of the outrage of which I was made a victim last night.”

“He did,” said Clayton.

“Zo! I have thought well to come and give you the tale myself, so that there can be no shirking of your responsibility through want of knowledge. It is not my usual custom to interfere with matters personally. My agent makes all arrangements for me——”

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“Let me hear your tale, sir,” said the Captain sharply, “if you have one. I don’t want a history of your habits. They fail to interest me.”

The pianist turned his pale face to Mr. Horrocks. “Ah, you are the principal steward, is not that so?”

“No, sir, I have the honor of being Purser here.”

“Zo! Is there a difference?”

Mr. Horrocks kept his temper with an effort. Captain Clayton came to the rescue of his dignity.

“If you were a gentleman, Mr. Janocky, as you claim to be, you would not be so offensive. Now get on with your tale, sir. Our time is valuable.”

Janocky was not accustomed to being spoken to like this. Amongst those who fawned upon him and flattered him, it was *his* time that was looked upon as precious. But he was shrewd enough to see that this grave ship’s captain, and this stout purser before him would not put up with too many airs and graces. So, with his pale brows clouded with pettish resentment, he got on with his story.

“I woke up last night,” he said, “with the feel of someone snapping something on one of my wrists, and before I was thoroughly aroused, or could resist, something was snapped on to the other, and I found that I was imprisoned by handcuffs. The electric light was switched off, and there is no porthole to my cabin. It is the first time I have ever been given an inside room. On other lines the authorities have always

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seen that I have had one of the best cabins on the boat."

"This steamboat," said Clayton, "is run as a commercial speculation, not for charity. I feel convinced that the Purser has given you the exact class of room you paid for. If you wanted a better room you should have paid more."

Horrocks felt a pleasant glow, and made a mental comment that the outstanding account between him and Captain Clayton was thereby settled. Janocky looked sullen, and patted his mop of hair petulantly. He did not like this undifferential treatment. But a rap on the table, and a sharp, "Get along, sir," from Clayton, set him talking again. He was not a man of much nerve.

"I could see the fellow only dimly in the light which came from the door. He was of middle height. He had over his head and face and shoulders a towel with holes cut for his eyes, and when I attempted to speak he crammed a wooden gag into my mouth and tied it there with string behind my head. Then he took a razor from his pocket and opened it. I decided that he intended murder; here was some en-  
vier of my art!"

Unconsciously the pianist warmed up to his tale. The dramatic instinct was overcoming the sense of resentment.

"But no, murder was not threatened. A worse

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injury was brandished against me. My art, the touch which Heaven has given me to enrapture multitudes, was made into a vulgar commercial counter. The assassin approached his razor to my wrists. Either he would cut the tendons, and rob the world forever of the sound of my playing, or I should write and sign a bond to ransom them by the payment of £10,000. With such an alternative, there was only one choice. I must make any sacrifice to preserve my art. So I wrote as he dictated, that on my honor as a gentleman I would pay him this money he demanded, at the close of my tour in America, and pay it, too, in such manner that he would never be detected. Then he went away, and I lay half fainting till next morning came, and with it a steward, who presently brought an evil-smelling mechanist, who filed the fetters from my wrists. That is all."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Horrocks, "there's nothing binding in a scribble written like that. It's only one of the passengers having a rise out of you. You lay yourself open to this sort of thing, my good sir, with your confounded affectations. If you'd more sense of humor, you'd have seen through it for yourself."

"It is evident that you cannot appreciate my point of view," said Janocky. "I am a gentleman; therefore I shall do as I have promised. The money must be paid, and it rests on my honor to find a means of

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doing this so that the recipient shall not be discovered. It is quite possible you and other people might have acted differently under the circumstances. I cannot understand your codes. I do not wish to understand them. I am a gentleman."

"I hear you say it," commented Mr. Horrocks, and shrugged his plump shoulders.

"Could you recognize the man who came to your room?" asked Clayton.

"I could not. It was dark, and he was covered as to the face with a towel. He was short in height. That is all I know. It was so dark that I had to write on the paper by feel. The paper, too, was so thin that once the pencil went through it. But I wrote what was demanded, and I shall carry out my promise."

"Well," said Clayton, "I have heard your statement now, sir. May I ask if you have any proposal to make?"

Herr Janocky looked up at the roof of the chart-house with languid insolence. "I should say that if you cannot protect better the passengers who intrust themselves to your care, your Company should pay the blackmail which is levied."

"I will make a note of your suggestion. Is that all you have to say?"

"It is."

"Then don't let me detain you here any longer."

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Actually this shipmaster was ordering about Janocky! The pianist gasped. His pale face almost flushed. But he went. There was a look about Captain Clayton of calm dignified command that sterner men than Herr Janocky had found embarrassing.

“He’s rather a noxious animal,” said Clayton, when the door closed, “isn’t he?”

“Oh, I never made any secret of it to you that I mistrusted the whole breed of theatricals,” Mr. Horrocks admitted.

Captain Clayton frowned, but he did not pursue that point for the present. “I’ve had this man’s agent in to see me. He gave about the same tale with a few variations and additions. It seems a pretty bad case. Of course, they’ll make out ashore that we are responsible for the whole thing.”

“If I know anything about the New York papers, we’re in for a hot time unless we can turn the tables on them. But, great Washington! I’d give something to have my knife into Mop-head.”

“I can imagine it.” Captain Clayton quite appreciated the depth of Janocky’s insult in mistaking Mr. Horrocks for a steward. “Well, Purser, I think you’re more capable of working out this affair than I am, and so I’ll pass it over to you.”

“Have I a free hand, sir?”

“If you can prove definitely and publicly that

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Janocky is trying to get at us—and I've somehow a suspicion of that—you can cut his hair for him for anything I care."

"Very well, sir," said Mr. Horrocks, and left the chart-house, and forthwith sought the society of the pianist's agent.

White, the agent, was an American Jew by nationality, and sufficiently well-travelled to have a full idea of the dignity of a big Atlantic liner's purser. He expressed gratification when invited down in Mr. Horrocks' room, and regret that he and his principal should have ruffled Mr. Horrocks' ease. He was just the man to appreciate gratuitous champagne, and he was given champagne of an eminent vintage. The Purser had an infinite tact over these details.

"Janocky is Janocky," said White, "and plays his own game. But I guess you and I are just plain, downright business men, Purser, and we only work on bedrock facts."

"That's so," said Mr. Horrocks. "Now, I told Mr. Janocky, when he gave the Skipper and myself his yarn, that the bond he talked of wasn't worth a farthing, and he'd no more call to pay than I had. You're with me there?"

"Not one millimetre."

"You're not?"

"Not any, sirre. Why, don't you see, the man with a towel was playing my game all along? I

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get paid by results. So it's to my interest to make the great name of Janocky just hum, and I don't care a red how I do it. Why should I? I'm not in this agenting business just for my health."

"You wouldn't be. Let me fill up your glass."

"Thanks. I'll even go further with you, and own up straight that it's me to a very large extent that's kept Janocky up to the sticking point. If we didn't take it seriously, it would lose him popularity at once. You see, we play a certain game. He's adapted for it by nature—hair, old family, pale face, live-for-Art, gentility, and all that—and I keep him up to it, hundred and ten cents to the dollar. But it's a difficult game, and it's easy broke down, and if there's one thing we couldn't stand more than another, it would be to be made ridiculous."

"Oh, I quite see that. But won't your man look a bit of a fool ante-ing up £10,000 when there's no earthly need for him to part with a farthing?"

"Nos'r. Who'll pay that money? Not the great Janocky! Not much! You see, between you and me, he's a Jew, and that nationality isn't fond of chucking away its hard cash." Mr. White shut one eye and looked appreciatively at his wine-glass. "Nos'r. But don't you see that his admirers in the States will hand round the hat and make up that £10,000 smiling? They'll just jump at the chance of proving their gratitude to the man who spared

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to the world of music the tendons of Janocky's wrists. You know all about working the newspapers, don't you?"

"Some," said the Purser.

"So do I. That's why I'm Janocky's manager. An' I guess I'll fix this up as easy as falling off a cable-car."

"Have you any idea who the blackmailer is?"

"Nop. Reckon I'm satisfied enough with things as they are. I'm not the man, sir, to quarrel with a good advertisement. But if you want me to give a guess, I should say it was a woman who held him up. Four of them have proposed marriage to him on board already. And the odds are, it's one of these that's done it out of spite."

"Who says they proposed to him?"

"Oh, it's fact enough. Women do. He gets about five proposals a week on the average, some of them in writing, some verbally. I've both read and heard them. It's all part of the outfit."

"Like the hair and the gentility?"

"I suppose so," said the agent pleasantly. "Great thing is to find out what your public likes, and then give it them. We do that. Why, I calculate eighteen per cent. of our receipts at concerts comes from front seats taken by ladies who are in love with that 'elegant sweet Janocky.' Say, this is real nice wine."

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Mr. White was all affability and frankness, but when the Purser summed up results afterwards, he found he had got very little out of him. Moreover he was not in the least to be turned away from his plan of campaign. "Of course, it's a purely business matter," he confessed, "and has to be treated as such. Let alone I have my own percentage to look after, there's Janocky who wouldn't give way."

"Why I thought he was far too big a gentleman to tarnish his mind with the idea of vulgar finance; I understood he left all business entirely in your hands."

"Oh, does he?"—Mr. White shut one sharp eye—"I know he lets on to that in public; it's all part of the game; but between you and me, the man's a Jew by birth, and he's as keen as most of his tribe. There are no flies on Janocky when it comes to raking in the cash."

"I hate to have any boat I'm on mixed up with a thing like this."

"Natural, I guess. I'm sure you know, Purser, that I just hate to annoy you. But this racket's hard business with me, and one can't give way to sentiment about it."

"No," said Mr. Horrocks, "I suppose not. Well; what I must do, is to lay hands on that bond."

The agent laughed genially. "I wish you joy of your hunt. But, say, isn't it rather a big contract?"

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The man or the woman who's savvy enough to think of such a piece of blackmailing, would have enough sand left over to hide their receipt pretty brightly."

"Oh, I don't say I'll stumble upon it without trouble."

"I should smile. Why, sir, you can't search the ship. You can't go and smell through all the trunks, and unstitch the soles off all the passengers' shoes, and examine their persons like they do the Kaffirs at Kimberley. That would make a worse scandal than leaving things as they are."

The bottle was empty, and Mr. Horrocks allowed his guest to depart then, and presently he himself went out for a tour in some of the passage-ways and cabins of the great liner, making exhaustive inquiries. He cast about here, there, and everywhere for a clue. He put questions right and left. He cross-examined half the stewards on the ship, and personally searched the great pianist's stateroom with a microscopical accuracy. And at last he got hold of a glimmer of suspicion, and worked on at it with grim, tireless persistence.

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### CHAPTER II.

THE Purser did not err on the side of over-scrupulousness in his methods; the occasion did not seem to him to demand too much niceness. To those of his intimates who talked on the subject, he said that he acted as ship's purser merely to earn his pay; but somewhere deep within his rotund exterior there was a strong love for the vessel on which he served, and a high regard for her chastity. Mr. Horrocks was a bachelor, but if he had possessed a wife he would naturally have been resentful against anyone who brought scandal against her. He told himself that all his affections were concentrated on the institution called "Rocks' Orphanage," of which he was sole patron and autocrat, and that he cared for nothing in the wide world beside. But when it came to the point, he showed he could be as jealous of the reputation of the *Leeds* as he had so often shown himself to be for his darling institution.

As a consequence, when the chance of revenge for the Janocky episode did come in his way, he was inclined to be vindictive. He might have called in

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the master-at-arms on board. He might have preferred a charge to the police ashore in New York, and given the culprit into their custody, and secured for him a spell of contemplation in the penitentiary; but he preferred his own to either of these methods.

White himself had pointed out that ridicule was the lash which Janocky dreaded most. Moreover, a great steamer line, like a pianist, lives and prospers to a great extent by the favor of the Press ashore, and Mr. Horrocks had a keen eye to the advertisement of the Town S.S. Co. The tale, if it came off as he intended, would be told humorously, but it would none the less show to intending customers that the Town Company took a most fatherly care of all their passengers, and that on the S.S. *Leeds* in particular they were most keenly looked after. And finally, he had got in memory that Janocky had shown gratuitous offensiveness in that matter of his official dignity. Mr. Horrocks did not easily forgive anyone who mistook him for a steward.

With a grim appreciation of the dramatic fitness of things, Mr. Horrocks timed his exposure to take place when all the passengers were gathered together in the saloon on the occasion of the ship's concert.

As a general rule, the Purser took a very lukewarm interest in that usual incident of a transatlantic voyage, the ship's concert. The proceeds, by immemorial custom, went to the Sailors' Orphan Home,

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and people paid freely and cheerfully. As was natural, they only made outlay of a certain amount in charity during the voyage, and as a consequence, having paid up this at the concert, they invariably turned a deaf ear to the claims of that less-known institution, Rocks' Orphanage, however deftly its worthiness was urged.

But on the present occasion Mr. Horrocks threw himself with ardor into the task of making the concert a success. The first movement towards holding it had been originally set on foot, as has been mentioned before, by Pitcairn, principally because that worthy man wanted to boast afterwards in Bradford that once he had been the Great Janocky's impresario. Once the chance of doing this had been taken away, Pitcairn's interest dropped, and when he decided that he "wasn't going to bother about it any more," no one else saw fit to put on his discarded mantle.

The Purser, however, by a little judicious raillery, soon brought up Pitcairn once more to the scratch, and when on the top of this he whispered a certain little secret into his ear, that amateur manager snapped his fingers with vast delight.

"No, really?" he said. "It's a bit too good to be true. Are you sure you've got him?"

"On toast," chuckled the Purser. "Don't breathe

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a word. You're the only man on the boat I've told. Even the Skipper doesn't know."

"Catch me letting on. I'll do my share; that concert shall hum. But you'll have to guarantee that the Great Janocky shall be there, and you'll have to get his signature."

"I'll work that through White, easy enough. He's a great man, White, when you know how to deal with him. So free and open. Keeps on telling you in confidence Janocky is a Jew."

They both grinned.

"Can we have the Second Classers into the concert?" asked Pitcairn.

"Well, it's against our usual rule. But I'll make an exception this time."

"You ought to," said Pitcairn. "The larger the audience the better Janocky performs. He says so himself."

Mr. Horrocks, however, on second thoughts approached Herr Janocky himself, and proved himself an accurate judge of human nature.

Where anyone else would have been suspicious, the pianist's vanity helped him easily into the trap. Herr Janocky promised not only to attend the concert and sit in the front row, so that seats near him might be charged at double figures, but also he consented to sign one of the programmes, so that the precious autograph might be put up to auction for

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the benefit of the fund. He was even so unsuspicious that he could not forego the opportunity of being offensive.

“Let me see,” he said in his vague, absent way, “you told me you were Purser here, didn’t you?”

“Quite correct, sir,” said Mr. Horrocks.

“I somehow thought you were head steward. You couldn’t take a message for me, could you, to my bedroom steward? I want my pillow-case changed. The one I have to put up with at present is coarse and full of holes.”

“I am not here to be your messenger boy,” said Mr. Horrocks furiously, and turned away. He was angry with himself for allowing this pianist to draw him, but really his own proper pride had to be considered.

However, when the evening of that day came, and with it the concert, he was able to take as complete a revenge as any man could desire. Pitcairn was the man who was running the concert, and nobody could mistake the fact. Pitcairn had crossed between Liverpool and New York so many times that he felt he had a proprietary interest in the North Atlantic and in all amusements carried on upon its waters, and he let everybody know it. The passengers did not mind. They are apt to be good-natured on little points like these. They were quite ready also to encore every item on the programme, not because

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of its merits especially, but through deference to the performer's feelings. In fact a pleasanter audience than the one on a first-rate Atlantic liner which assembles for the usual concert, it would be hard to discover.

This concert, then, like all its thousand predecessors, went through its appointed course with friendly appreciation, and Pitcairn fussed about to keep himself thoroughly in evidence. But when the last song was sung, Pitcairn mounted the platform and made his final announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Horrocks will now do a turn. His talents are too well known to you to need any introduction from me. He himself will explain what he is going to do. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the fairy Purser."

Whereupon, amid a chuckle of amused laughter, Pitcairn got down, and the burly form of Mr. Horrocks took his place.

The Purser could make a good speech, and he knew it. He made a good speech then, pleasantly humorous, delicately pathetic. He put forward the claims of the Sailors' Orphan Home, thanked the audience for coming to the concert, thanked them for what they had subscribed already, and hoped that they would bid well for the programme that he was now about to offer for auction, and that he would be able to knock it down at a price worthy of

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the name that was written on it. The programme would be one to be preserved. It would carry memories with it. It would carry also the signature of the best known pianist of the day.

Mr. Horrocks, with an effort, got a finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and fumbled there. "H'm, lost my pencil," he said. "Mr. White, will you lend me yours?"

Mr. White, all smiles and diamonds and glitter, handed up a gold pencil case.

The Purser grasped it between the tips of a fat finger and thumb, and drew back his shirt cuff and sleeve to expose a bare and brawny arm, after the fashion of a conjurer. He cast down his eyes on White, and that person moved in his seat uneasily.

"Now before we go on to ask Herr Janocky to put his valued signature to the programme, I propose to show you another little matter that will interest you. I have here a gold pencil case given me by Mr. White. There is no deception, ladies and gentlemen; nothing up the sleeve; no palming. I haven't a cat's notion of sleight-of-hand, as Mr. Pitcairn or any other gentleman here who knows me will testify. But I can do one little conjuring trick just now. You all see this pencil case?"

"Yes, yes."

"Which belongs to Mr. White?"

"But does it?"

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“Mr. White, is that your pencil case?”

White cleared his throat and said in rather a strained voice that it was.

“Well and good.” Mr. Horrocks laid the pencil case on the top of the piano. “Now, ladies and gentlemen, it will be fresh in your memory that Herr Janocky has been thrilling this boat with an account of how some ingenious person came to his room in the night, and offered him a choice between having his wrists hamstrung or paying up blackmail. It will not have escaped you that he chose to pay.”

“Quite right of him,” shouted someone.

“No doubt, no doubt. And so he entered into a bond to ante up £10,000, writing it out and signing it himself. He could not identify his visitor (so he says), and as a consequence you all lie under suspicion. So I thought it would be a fitting opportunity this evening to show who was the ingenious person who has caused so much excitement. Will any gentleman or lady oblige me by breaking up that pencil case?”

White stepped up.

“Other than Mr. White. Sit down again, sir. Great Washington, if you don’t sit down I’ll have you taken away and put in irons. Ah, I thought we should have peace and harmony again.”

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“You’d better open the pencil case yourself,” said Pitcairn.

“Well, if the meeting wishes it,” said Mr. Horrocks, and took up the pencil gingerly between his fingers. “You’ll see, on close examination, those of you that are near enough, that the end is fastened with sealing wax. Now, I’ll chip this off, and there you’ll notice there’s a little hollow inside stuffed with a roll of paper. Will someone oblige me with a pin?”

Mr. Horrocks held the pencil case at arm’s length towards the audience, and picked at it clumsily with the pin. Every eye in that huge, gorgeous, sea dining-room hung on him unwinkingly. The eyes of Mr. White and Herr Janocky watched with something very nearly approaching terror in them.

The Purser worked with vast deliberation. “I must not tear anything,” he explained. And by degrees the end of a little tightly rolled cylinder of paper showed itself, which at length he managed to grip with his stumpy fingers and pull out. He unfolded it with vast care, working with hands held far away from his round body, as a conjurer works before his audience, and in the end he pressed it out flat, and waved it towards Janocky.

“Do you recognize this?”

“Yes,” said the pianist.

“Your handwriting?”

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“Yes.”

“The bond you gave to the fellow who called on you that night?”

“Yes.”

“Would the caller be the height and build of your friend Mr. White?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Horrocks. “As to whether Mr. White really intended to extract his blackmail, or whether you really intended to pay him, or whether the whole business is merely one of your advertising dodges, you can settle between yourselves. I don’t know, and I don’t care. What I’m pleased about is that this boat leaves the court without a stain on her character, and that you, ladies and gentlemen, are cleared of the suspicion that there is a blackmailer among you. That’s all I’ve got to say.”

Pitcairn jumped on to the platform. “Ladies and gentlemen! *With* musical honors, and as loud as you like it. ‘For he’s a jolly good Purser.’”

Which chant they sang very heartily.

“Say!” cried a voice at the other end of the room, when the roar of song had ended, “there’s a syndicate been formed on board here to acquire a certain pill factory in the States, provided we could get a certain party who’s with us to-night as advertisement manager. Well, he didn’t seem to chip into notion before, but now that we’ve seen his skill, I’m empowered

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to double our original offer. I should say that he'd be wise to close. Seems to me he'll find the States have rather soured on his piano playing for the present."

With which piece of bitter mockery the concert broke up.

Now, at the hint of Mr. Horrocks, Captain Clayton had discovered that the duties of navigation would keep him all that evening on the bridge; but when the lights were switched off for the night, and the passengers had turned in, the Purser went to the chart-room and laughingly told what had happened. He was very pleased with himself, and made no effort to conceal his satisfaction. Indeed, Clayton was equally pleased, and congratulated him cordially on his success. "But I want to know how it was done," he asked. "How did you work up to it?"

"That's my secret," said Mr. Horrocks grudgingly.

"But mayn't I share it?" asked the Captain.

"Well, I haven't told another soul on board and don't mean to. The result was quite enough to give them. It spoils a trick to tell how it's done. But I suppose you're Skipper. Well, you see it was this way. I examined the handcuffs which were filed off Mop-head's wrists: no result from them: then I went myself and searched his room; found nothing. Then I called a muster of all the stewards who serve that alley-way, asking them to look for any relics—

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key of handcuffs, you know, that towel with the eye-holes in it, or, in fact, anything suspicious. An hour afterwards his bedroom steward brought me the gag that had been used in Mop-head's mouth.

“I can't say I saw anything special in it at first. It was just wood and string. But presently I noticed that the string had got two different colored strands in it, green and white.”

The Purser paused gloatingly, so Clayton laughed again and said: “Oh, go on.”

“Well, I had another muster of stewards and exhibited the string. Had they seen any more like that? Yes, one of them had swept up two bits from White's floor. Where were they? Flung overboard naturally. But the steward was sure it was the same string, white with a green strand.

“Now that wasn't much to go on, of course, but it gave me a tip. I'd had my eye on Master White before; so I got an opiate from the doctor, and slipped it into his bedside tea next morning, and let the steward take it in as usual. I'd Mr. White laid out and sleeping like a corpse in ten minutes.

“I waited till he was sound off, and then I paid a morning call, and I guess I went through his traps as thoroughly as any professional burglar could have done it. Not a bit of luck. There was no bond, or anything like one.

“So I went through his effects a second time.

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“Now you’ll have noticed what a very smart, over-dressed man he is. Too much shine everywhere, too many diamonds; things all too new and glittering. But in his waist-coat pocket was a gold pencil case that was out of keeping with his general gorgeousness. It was scratched, and newly scratched, all at one end. The top had been off—it struck me it had been wrenched off with a pocket knife, and it was fastened on again with red sealing-wax. The edges of the wax were new and shiny, not dull like they get if they had been carried in your pocket for a day or two. And then I looked at his pocket knife, and one blade was nicely jagged.”

“Good man, Horrocks.”

“Pure deduction,” said the Purser, rubbing his fat hands. “So I whipped off the top, and there was paper inside. I pulled it out: it was the bond right enough, signed Janocky.

“Now, it wouldn’t do to own up that I’d loaded an opiate into a passenger’s morning tea and searched his traps, so I put back the bond again, mended up the pencil case, and stowed it back in the pocket of his waistcoat. It had struck me that this sort of person likes the bright light of publicity on some of his doings, and, as I hadn’t been spared much, I didn’t see why I should be gentle on my part. So I worked up that busy ass, Pitcairn, into getting the concert going again, and when it was over I ‘found’

## THE GREATEST PIANIST.

the bond inside White's pencil before all the passengers. I think most of them enjoyed it."

"Bravo! You're a great man, Horrocks."

"I don't know about that. But I'll bet I've made a slump in Janocky shares in the States for a bit. Perhaps it'll teach him to be a bit more civil to the next purser he meets. And, what's more, I can work the Press for a pretty good ad. for the boat."

Mr. Horrocks was right about that last aspiration. When the passengers got through the weariness of the New York Customs House, and reached their hotels, they were able to read in ten papers all about "*Janocky's latest advertising dodge*," "*How they pamper their passengers on the Leeds*," and a spirited eulogy of "*The brightest Purser on the Atlantic Ferry*."

Mr. Horrocks had a fine art in handling the Press when he possessed good material.

But the incident had a more far-reaching effect than the stout Purser dreamed of at the time. There was on board the *Leeds* a little, unobtrusive man, whom no one honored with much attention, but who watched matters that befell around him with a keen and kindly eye. His keenness had in recent years made him a millionaire. His kindness prompted him to make inquiries concerning the work which was done by the remarkable institution, Rocks' Orphanage. His wealth enabled him, by the mere

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penning of a check, to endow the place with an opulence to which even its founder's dreams had never aspired.

His one proviso was that Mr. Horrocks should settle ashore and manage the Orphanage himself. And so the Western Ocean ferry is the poorer for the loss of its most popular and capable Purser, and the name of Horrocks no longer appears on requisitions and passenger-lists.

But in a certain Mr. Rocks, a personage of majestic port and somewhat pompous mien, old passengers think they sometimes trace a resemblance to one who, for a space of days, they were once proud to acknowledge as a friend.



## **The Transfer.**



# The Transfer.

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## CHAPTER I.

“My Christian Aunt!” cried Captain Image. “Forty tons of ivory! And you say there isn’t an *escribello* amongst it?”

“No,” said the man who had just come on board. “There’s no tusk in all my lot that’s anything much under a load.”

“Oh, come now,” said the captain of the *M’poso*. “Well, I’ll swear there isn’t one under forty pounds anyway; and what’s more, it’s pretty nearly all new stuff. I’ve not got any of your buried, split, brown, half-rotten relics. Yes, it’s a bit of a haul.” He jerked his thumb towards the low green line of West African hills which sprawled behind the beach. “And some people would say it was worth the three years I’ve sweated in the middle of that foul continent, though I’d not go so far as that myself.”

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Image rose to his feet and cleared the perspiration from his eyebrows with a forefinger. "We're wasting minutes," said he. "Drink up your fizz, and let me set about getting this stuff shipped, one-time. There's my own two surf boats, and there's the one from the factory, and if we promise to dash the bays a drink, and make 'em jump, we should get it all down under hatches before night comes away. It's not a bad beach to-day. I'll tell the carpenter to knock up a strong room." And murmuring to himself, "Forty blessed tons of ivory; forty bloomin' thousand pounds," Captain Image once more knocked the drops from his brow, and left the chart house.

Gering turned to me and laughed.

"Well, Calvert," said he, "it's very thoughtful of you to forget my name, and I daresay it does look deuced fishy for me to turn up vaguely out of nowhere on to a West African coasting steamer with all this plunder."

"Rumors were floating about," I suggested.

"Precisely. But the only man who could be nasty about the matter is—well, he's *gastados*; he's hanged, to dispose of him accurately; and so I can return to society as Cecil Gering, and the devil fly away with all *aliases*. But it was very thoughtful of you to forget my name all the same."

"It may interest you to know that Marion Kennedy is still unmarried."

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“Ah,” he said; “I quite trusted her. She told me she’d wait, and there was an end of the matter. Of course, being alive, she has waited.”

“You take it coolly. But come down and chop. That’s the second breakfast bell just gone, and I don’t suppose a semi-civilized meal will do you any harm.”

“No,” said Gering, “cargo-palaver first. If one of dem surf-boats with my ivory is split in getting off the beach, bang goes a thousand pounds.”

“And you’ve your cariers to pay off, I suppose?”

“Oh, they lib back for bush a month ago. But dem white men at factory will be none the worse for a little looking after. I know they’ve robbed me of half a ton of teeth already, and I want to impress on them that they’ll find it more healthy not to try for more. So I shall go and swear and frizzle on an African beach for the last time. Afterwards I shall come back here and gloat over my winnings, and maybe (if the mood takes me) I might spin you a queerish yarn.”

He took another of the Captain’s moist black Canary cigars, clapped on his pith helmet, and went down to the green surf-boat which was riding to the guess-warp alongside.

I dragged a Madeira chair under the shadiest part of the bridge-deck awning, and watched his crew of Elmina boys paddle him ashore. It struck me that I had just left a town where they would have given

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a good round sum in cash down for Master Gering, for the purpose of holding a trial over him and thereafter stringing him up by the neck till dead ; and that town was Boma, which is the capital of the Congo Free State. They were much annoyed with Cecil Gering at Boma. The Government which sits at that place (and has its strings pulled from Brussels) had recently sent one of its many filibustering expeditions to the neighborhood of the Wady Halfa (which is towards the other side of Africa), there to steal what was left of Emin Pasha's ivory. That has made one of the world's greatest and most coveted treasures during the last few years, and raiders from half the countries of the globe have been after it on fifty different philanthropic excuses ; and yet the precious store had been fingered by none before that date. But this latest commander, who was a Belgian baron in the service of the Etat du Congo, had most assuredly grabbed the larger part of the ivory, and had sent home dispatches to that effect, *via* Stanley Falls, a Congo steamer, Léopoldville, the caravan route, and Matadi.

That was all right, of course, and Boma drank ten cases of gin in cocktails to his health ; but simultaneously there drifted across Africa a later rumor which put quite a different face upon the matter. It came by that mysterious thing the native-telegraph, which no white man has yet been able to explain.

## THE TRANSFER.

It was incomplete, and it was entirely unofficial; but no one dreamed of questioning its reliability. It slipped out first through the lips of a comely young Cabenda lady, who held a certain position in the Dutch factory at Knocki; it drifted in with a caravan which brought rubber and kernels to the English factory at Kalla-Kalla; and finally it oozed into Boma itself, and was spoken of openly by the Free State forced laborers as they landed concrete bags from the Liverpool steamer. The rumor stated with clearness that "*Buli Vivi lib for die; dem ivory took; Englishman palaver.*" Which being interpreted meant, that the Baron (who had once been commandant of Vivi) was no more; that his plunder was another's; and that one of that much-loved race of Englishmen was at the bottom of the whole business. And this was all that had come through when I left the Congo. But local knowledge went far to supply the name of the Englishman. It was known that a certain reckless trader named Cecil Gering was on the prowl in the same district after that same coveted hoard of ivory.

These details passed through my mind as I watched the green boat make for the shore, uprise four times on creaming hills of surf, and then land with a jolt upon the beach and eject negroes like caterpillars' legs against her flanks. As I looked upon Gering whilst he walked over the gleaming sand to the white-

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roofed factory at the edge of the bush, it struck me he trod like a man of decision. And as I saw him during the rest of the day, superintending the shipment of his £40,000 worth of ivory under a baking torrent of sunshine, I came to the conclusion that he had within him the knack of handling men and making them (at whatever pains to themselves) do entirely as he, Cecil Gering, was pleased to wish.

Later it was impressed upon me that he was also a man of some personal strength. The whole consignment (as it seemed) of the ivory had been brought out safely through the surf, paddled up to the *M'poso*'s accommodation ladder, hefted on board tusk by tusk by Elminas and Krooboyes, and handed below to the appointed place under the watchful eyes of the purser and three mates. Captain Image had sworn himself to a standstill; and, gleaming with pleasure and perspiration, was giving orders for the carpenter to put nails in the strong-room door. The second engineer, who had been hanging round all day in the hope of "pinching" a small *escribello* for carving purposes, gave up the employment in disgust; and in fact everybody supposed the shipment was at an end. But happening to glance at the beach, where the shadows were growing long and black on the hot sand, I saw Gering in altercation with three other Europeans in white drill clothes; and presently the quartette of them joined in a furi-

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ous scuffle ; and presently only Cecil Gering was left standing on his feet. Two of the others lay on the ground motionless, but the third raised himself on an elbow and talked. Gering replied by gripping him by the coat and thumping his head with a shut fist ; but after the second thump the man threw up his hand and shouted up something to the boys who squatted panting under the verandah of the bamboo-walled factory. Whereupon they brought out more ivory to the extent of the green boat full, on the top of which Gering seated himself, and was launched successfully through the surf. I met him at the top of the *M'poso*'s gangway. He had a fine black eye, and seemed very pleased with himself. He mentioned that the three white men of the factory on the beach were probably sorry for having tried to rob him ; and just then the windlass on our forecastle head began to thunder as it hove an anchor out of African mud.

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### CHAPTER II.

GERING revelled in salt pork, beans, Dutch cheese, and tinned tomatoes at dinner that night, and we drank his health in Coast champagne, which cost its Hamburg brewer ninepence a bottle, and us ten shillings. He wanted to know a great deal about the 'Varsity boat race, and Hurlingham, and two or three clubs, and who had won the last three Derbys, and who had taken the Brownroyd shootings. And upon these, and some two thousand other topics, he questioned Image and myself with much appetite till half-past eleven went, and they turned out the smoke-room lights from the engine-room switch. But he made no mention of Marion Kennedy, and when asked what sort of shooting he'd had up in central Africa, he laughed and said he'd quite forgotten. It was not till we had left Sierra Leone and African soil for good, and were steaming for Grand Canary against the rip of the northeast trades, that he became at all communicative about himself. He said he supposed we should be able to get Egyptian cigarettes at the Métropole in Las Palmas if we were

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lucky, and then mentioned that he'd smoked his last somewhere on the head waters of the Nile.

"Were they part of Emin's loot?" I asked.

"Poor old Emin!" said he, looking thoughtfully at the black hawk-tailed sea-fowl which were sailing in our wake,—“no. There's precious little left of his goods and chattles undistributed. What with the Mahdist and the Arab lot, and those Belgian thieves—and other ragamuffins—Look at that gull, I say, with the red paper tied to his leg. The beggar's been perching on some steamer's awnings, and been caught and let go again.”

"Then you didn't gather your little lot of plunder at first hand?"

"My dear Calvert, what do you think? You don't actually suppose the whole hoard of ivory was stored in one big barn, do you, and that people had only to go up, and say they'd come, and start in to load their carriers?"

"I'm tolerably unprejudiced by theories on the subject."

"Well, let me tell you then, it's very thoroughly scattered, and if I'd had my own collecting to do, it's five tons I'd have landed through at this side with, and not forty. No, sir; it's a big business raking that stuff together."

"And that's where Caissier was so kind to you, then? He made the collection?"

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Gering frowned, and then he laughed. "Now, you know, old man," said he, "you're only guessing. You can't have learned that for certain; no, not possibly. But you're curious, aren't you? And I don't think I mind telling you the yarn. I suppose you'll repeat it, but then the Belgian lot daren't go for me after what happened, anyway, and so nothing can go wrong. But it's cold here, with this breeze. Let's drag chairs into the lee of the fiddley."

We made ourselves snug, and I smoked pioneer tobacco whilst Gering talked. He described the fitting out of a £3,000 caravan with the confidence of an expert; gave to an ounce the quantities of gin, brass wire, Manchester cotton, ball cartridge, and Marlin repeating rifles, with which it was equipped; and discoursed learnedly on the training of headmen, and the rates at which they could be hired. Then he recounted with some vividness his journeys over certain African roads (which much resemble goat tracks), his reception at various villages, his commercial dealings with some potentates, and his bloody scrimmages with others. And finally he came on to a time when luck had slightly deserted him, and he was laid up with a poisoned arrow in the leg, and fever in all his person.

"I tell you, old man, I didn't like that arrow one little bit," said Gering. "You know the cheerful way those natives have up there with their arrows.

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There's a big barbed head, and then a six-inch neck, all of iron, before the wooden shaft comes; and they wrap a straw round the neck, and pack it with clay and knead the poison into that."

"Like the arrow you dashed me yesterday out of your curios?"

"Own cousin. So you see there's small doubt about my having had the poison in me; and though I warmed up the place with a knife, and washed and carbolic-ed and fiddled about with it all I knew, I wasn't at all satisfied about having it out of me again. And then, when a regular baking dose of fever landed down on top of it all, and I couldn't lift a finger to help myself, it looked like being in an extremely tight place. Just at this stage of the proceedings, who should turn up to pay a call but the excellent Baron Caissier!"

"Whom you knew from previous acquaintance," I said.

"Whom I should have known if I had been in my senses," returned Gering, "which I was not, being badly delirious just then. However, he knew me, and had me put into a hammock and carried across to his camp. He'd grabbed a village near, in the usual gentle way those Belgian fellows have, by shooting down all the residents who refused to quit; and as there was plenty of good chop handy, he'd settled down there for a week or so to recruit. His

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men had had a skinful of fighting and short commons just before, and there was a good deal of sickness and wounds amongst them. However, he'd a doctor with him—these Belgians always hunt in couples—and the doctor was physicking them for all he was worth. The doctor also tried his hand on me, and I give him credit for doing his best, though that was little enough."

"Belgian doctors," said I, "don't come out to the Etat Independant du Congo just because they've a superabundance of learning."

"They don't," said Gering. "And besides, this one, poor beggar, had a hob-nailed liver that was killing him by inches. He'd a face on him the color of a new brass pot. I never saw such a face. And as it turned out, he did die, and he chose a very awkward time for me."

"Still I must say that at first Caissier was friendly enough,—though there's nothing special in that, because one always does chum up with another white man when one meets him in a God-forgotten hole like the Interior there. We used to take our morning Eno together, and he was always within shout of my mosquito bar any time during the day when I was awake and sensible. And, with the exception of one person of the female sex, and one house in Yorkshire, we talked relishingly enough over the people and places we knew in common, both in Eng-

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land and Brussels. At least, he did most of the talking: I had fever most days, and what with that and the hole in my leg, I was a pretty tolerable wreck, and it was about as much as I could manage to listen consecutively. But now and then he'd let slip a yarn of one or two things that had happened since he'd been up there in the Interior on the ivory raid, and, by Jove, some of his pretty tales fairly made me shiver. I'm not particular myself; a man can't be if he's got to handle Central African savages with any degree of success, and nobody but a hypocrite will tell you anything else; but some of that Baron's doings had been just too horrible to talk of. Still that's only a Belgian's way, you know, in Africa. It never occurs to them that a nigger has any more feelings than a tree.

“But his talking about the ivory made me get my business stop out, too: I didn't want to let him think he'd got all the luck and all the *savvy*; and, like an ass, I let out I'd picked up a couple of hundred loads.

“He snapped me up quickly enough. ‘But you haven't got that amount in your camp,’ said he.

“‘Not much,’ said I: ‘the bigger part of it's *cachéd* in a snug place till I'm ready to leave this part of the country. But that isn't yet. I want more ivory before I march for the Coast.’

“‘Grave-digging palaver?’

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“‘No such foolishness. That always leaves a trace, in spite of planting bush over the hole. No, Baron; I turned a stream, and buried my ivory in the bed, and then let the stream go back to hide everything.’

“‘Ah, good palaver,’ said Caissier, and fell to wondering where the stream might be. But he didn’t turn awkward then, though the doctor (who by this time was past walking about and had to be carried on his rounds) warned me to look out for squalls. ‘You’re an awful fool for telling him,’ said the doctor. ‘Why, man, the forty miserable loads you had in your bivouac when we first came up were enough to make him envious, and he talked of snuffing you out and grabbing it, and he only let you alone because I promised to tell your consul at Boma if you got killed. You know our State must have ivory, and if it can’t be got one way it must be grabbed another. The State must show a dividend for the King Leopold and the other shareholders.’

“‘Then what do you recommend?’ said I. I felt very weak just then, and uninventive.

“‘You must be your own consul right here,’ said the doctor, ‘and look after yourself. You aren’t in London now, or Brussels—you’re in Central Africa; and there isn’t as much law to the thousand square miles here as would fill a brass cartridge case. And

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you needn't count on me, either. I'm bound to peg out during the next two or three days, and not all the surgeons in this world, nor all the pharmacopœia could save me. Look at the color of me. I tell you I'm in hell's torments all the time, and I wish it was over.'

"Poor beggar, he did die next day, that doctor; and I was sorry, because he did mean well, though he was an awful bungler with drugs. But I didn't see him buried. I was under arrest in my hut, and very much expected to be made an early funeral of myself.

"It happened this way. Caissier came in for his usual morning's chat, and after we'd been talking about one thing and another for some time, he let slip the name of Marion Kennedy. I believe he did it on purpose to draw me. But, as I never care for beating about the bush on matters of that kind, I told him straight out that the pair of us intended to make a wedding of it when I got back.

"'Ah,' says he, with a sour look on him; 'that's new, then?'

"We got engaged just before I sailed, and if it didn't get into the papers it's no fault of ours. We didn't make any secret about the matter. But she was young and I wasn't thirty, so it was arranged that I was to make this one last trip to Africa by way of picking up a bit more to set up housekeeping on.'

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“I suppose you know I was *épris* in that quarter myself?”

“My dear Baron, isn’t it rather unwise to bring this back to public memory after what I’ve been mentioning?”

“And I’m not the man,” he added between his teeth, ‘to take quietly the matter of being supplanted.’ And then with a jerk he said, ‘How many rifles have you in your camp?’

“I thought he was trying to change the subject, and said readily enough, ‘Oh, more than I want. I can supply you with some if you like.’

“And how many cases of ammunition could you give with them?”

“Maybe twenty.”

“No more?”

“No, I couldn’t spare more than that. The rifles are ten-shot Marlins; not your service weapons, of course, but they’re regular beauties for the work out here.”

“He grinned at me evilly. ‘I don’t think I should add any more details if I were you, Monsieur Gering. You’ve made a quite sufficiently black case out against yourself already.’

“I raised myself up on my elbow and stared at him. ‘What the devil do you mean?’ I said.

“Merely that you are importing “arms of precision” into the Congo Free State territories, and of-

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fering them for sale. That's a penal offense against International Law.'

"It would be if I were guilty, which in this case emphatically I am not. The arms were brought into the country as a reserve for my own purposes.'

"I hear you say it,' he answered. 'But about your guilt in the matter I prefer to hold my opinion. I shall try you for this offense, monsieur, to-morrow morning at sun-up; and if you are convicted, you shall hang before the sun has set.'

"You cannot do this,' I said, sinking back upon the bed. 'The charge is absurd, and if it had to be tried at all it must come before the courts of Boma. You have no authority.'

He waved his hand to the soldiers' lines. One man was playing *tom-tom* on a tin pan, half a score were dancing, half a hundred were looking on, laughing and chattering like apes. A few were cleaning rifles, and the rest were asleep in the grass-and-wattle huts. 'There is my authority,' he said. 'Do you think that there is anyone amongst' those brutes who would dare to pit his will in such a matter against mine? Do you think that for a moment any animal of them would hesitate to hang a dozen stray whites like you if I so order it? Why, man,' he said, thrusting his white savage face down close to mine, 'they would hang you first and chop you afterwards if I gave them the opportunity, and you

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know it.—Pah!' he said, and strode out of the hut into the dust and the blazing sunshine.

"I lay on the bed and shuddered. I knew that what he said might quite well happen. The only 'yea' or 'nay' about the matter rested with Baron Caissier himself."

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### CHAPTER III.

GERING paused and passed a hand wearily before his eyes; and then he looked dreamily out over the tumbled blue waste of sea, and stayed for awhile without speaking. Then he sighed, and went on.

“I suppose Caissier had his excuse. He was doing it all through his fondness for Marion. Indeed, he sent me a note some two hours after he had left the hut which ran like this:—

“*If you like to pass your word of honor as a gentleman that you'll give her up, I will quash proceedings against you, and you may go your way in peace —you and your ivory.*”

“But I tore the note into small pieces and gave them to the orderly, bidding him hand them back by way of answer, and take care not to lose a single fragment. ‘Dem-plenty-much-big ju-ju,’ I told him, ‘and if one lilly piece him blow away, you die one-time. You quite savvy?’

“But that was the last occasion on which any mention of Marion cropped up between us. The rest of the matter was fought through under the other guise: I was smuggler of ‘arms of precision’; he was

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the jealous guardian of the International Law; and as such he formed himself into judge, accuser, and jury, all in one.

“The trial was the baldest of farces. Caissier sat on a hammock chair under the shade of a mango tree, with an ammunition box to serve as table, and the margins of a novel (the only available paper, it seemed) to take his notes on. I was carried up and put in another chair facing him; formality was given to the court by a guard of ten negroes, who squatted out in the sunshine with their Albini rifles between their knees, nibbling pink kola nuts; and when the game was nearly through the doctor with his yellow face was brought up in a hammock and laid on the ground between us. The man was obviously dying; it was against Caissier’s direct orders that he had come; and I think God has recorded it in his favor that he protested to the last against (what he termed) the murder which his superior officer was determined on.

“But Caissier was a man with the will of a mule. The ivory had tempted him; with the ivory and Marion together he would have considered it sheer fatuousness to let me go. I appreciated that quite as well as he did, and I knew that protests were words wasted; and yet I had to make them.

“I demanded remission to the Supreme Court at Boma.

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“He refused it with a gesture.

“Then,’ said I, ‘if you kill me here it will be a cold-blooded murder, and you will have to look out for the consequences.’

“‘Which I am quite prepared to do,’ said he. ‘My inferior officer refuses to back me up: well, he will not be here much longer to interfere. You think the news of this may leak out, and that then your great brute Government in London will want explanation? Well, the moon may fall, though I don’t think it will. You will have disappeared, that is all, and been forgotten.’

“‘My men will carry the news through.’

“‘Ah,’ said Caissier grimly, ‘you pay me a very poor compliment there, monsieur. I shall have the handling of your *enfants*. I shall enlist them as Free State soldiers, and they will have to fight as they are bidden, and when I leave this country they will stay behind. Now do you see?’

“I did; I had nothing more to say; and the carriers took me back to the shade of my own grass-and wattle hut. The fever gripped me again. The arrow-wound throbbed in my leg, and I lay through the rest of that baking day in a state approaching stupor.

“But night came away cool and black, with a breeze, and the smell of dew, and I revived enough to call a boy and bid him go and ask for the doc-

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tor. He was not long away: he came back with the news that the poor fellow had died an hour after my trial, and was already put under the ground.

“The shock acted on me like tonic. I realized then that there was not a living soul who could bring me help, and that if there was to be no Englishman hanged next morning, I was the only man who could prevent it.

“I stayed awake, straining my brain for a plan away through the night hours. Yet none came,—at least no scheme that could be called either original or brilliant. But when the black velvet of the night began to show grey threads in its texture, and the chill of the coming dawn was enough to make me sneeze, I knew then that I must get up and act, or be content to die within the hour.

“With an effort I got up from the bed and limped to the door of the hut. Fortune patted me on the back from the outset. The sentry was sleeping. Caissier’s hut was a hundred yards away. With painful steps I made my way over the intervening space, treading with niceness through the squalid camp-litter. The soft carpet of dust deadened all sound. I reached the hut and passed inside. Caissier was asleep under a mosquito bar. On a case (which served as table) within reach of his arm, was a Winchester repeating rifle. The moment of my laying my hand on its pistol stock and the mo-

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ment of his opening an eye were synchronous. He blinked a time or two, and then lay still, watching me.

“I cannot kill you unresisting,” I said, “but if you give me the least opening I’ll shoot you down as I would a snake that was attacking me. Now get up at once, fold your hands behind your neck, and walk outside this hut. You are not to speak. I will do all the talking that is necessary. And, as I say, if you don’t do exactly as you are bid, I will blow your head in. Now march.”

“Outside the grass-and-wattle house, hanging by a thong to the eaves, was the tin basin used to wake the camp each morning. I beat it with the butt of the Winchester; and, in answer to the clangor, the troops and carriers began to issue sleepily from their shelters. I shouted, and they came towards me; I shouted till all came, and then I marshalled them into rank with the rifle’s nose. When they all stood attention I lifted up my voice and spoke.

“My frien’s,” I said, “you all-e-same slaves; all-e-same bushmen. Dis soldier-palaver no good. You no get good chop; you get plenty much fighting; an’ you never get dash cloth or salt. Massa Baron here say you lib back for Matadi. My frien’s, you fool for believe dat. You all lib for die long before Massa Baron lib back for Matadi.”

“The meeting chattered its adherence to these

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views. The meeting was evidently impressed. I went on. 'Now look. You come all-e-same ivory-palaver wid me. I not make you fight once. I give you light loads. I give you plenty-much-fine chop. And when we lib for Coast I dash you all my cloth, and all my wire, and all my salt, and all my guns, and all my powder. You be rich man then, and have slaves and tobacco, and gin and wives, and never do any more work but just eat goat-chop and wear clothes.'

"It was a dazzling prospect. They put their heads together, and a village of monkeys could not have made more chatter. At last one headman said, 'Massa, you Englishman?'

"'Plenty much,' said I.

"'Massa, dem Massa Baron Englishman?'

"'Nother palaver,' said I: 'he Belgian.'

"'Massa, Belgian all-e-same Englishman. Both white man.'

"'Nother palaver,' said I. 'A Belgian's a bush Englishman. Savvy?'

"That fetched them. They quite grasped the situation then. They saw that I disclaimed all relationship with the other white man's breed, and they were prepared to trust me on spec. You know they'd been abominably treated by Caissier in the first place; and, in the second, the niggers that make the Free State troops have the morality of rats on the subject of loyalty; and so the way they acted

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was quite what was to be expected of them. Indeed, when I ordered them as the first act of their allegiance to take over their late commandant and hang him (on the tree where he had promised to elevate me) he did not make any whole-hearted objection. He had held his tongue up till that, standing on my right front, with fingers clasped behind his head, because he knew I should shoot him if he spoke. He talked then in deliberate request for the shot. But he did not get one. I chose not to dirty my own fingers on him.

“I gave orders to break camp one-time, and we were all in a hurry to get it over. I never saw Africans work quicker. Each man had a load on his head within half the hour, and the sun had not crept more than a hand’s breadth clear of the grass when the caravan was on the move to join my own men at the other side of the timber.

“But I had to have one last look at that place; and just when we were going to pass beneath the outliers of the trees, I made my carriers halt where they were, hip-deep in the grass, and I thrust my head over the edge of the hammock. The caravan was following like some many-jointed snake; there were forty tons of ivory being borne in my wake; and the man who had gathered it was dangling between heaven and earth as a black blot before the gold of the rising sun. He had not been without

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his points. I took off my hat to him, and for a minute remained uncovered.

“Then with a sigh I let my head fall back into the hammock. I was sorry, but Caissier had forced me into it. Why does the African air make men into such savages? But I was glad about the ivory.”

• • • • •

Gering ceased speaking, and for awhile the silence grew between us. Then Captain Image came up, sheltering the glowing bowl of his pipe by a cupped palm against the trade. “Well, me lads,” said he, “the old *M’poso*’s going to be a full ship for Las Palmas, home. Our agent there sent me a cable just before we left Sarry Leone. There’s a party of swells coming to Liverpool with us that have been wintering in Grand Canary. So there’s no more coming on deck in pyjamas for you, and no more pipes for me. We shall have three titles on board of us, me lads, and you’ll have to wear boiled shirts and me brass buttons and a cigar, to do justice to them. I forget two of the names, but I do remember Lady Marion Kennedy was one. But I don’t suppose they’ll have much to say to us. That sort are just a small cut above us Coasters.”

## **The Inventor.**



# The Inventor.

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## CHAPTER I.

"WELL, of course, it's your palaver," said Captain Image, "but I tell you plainly that you're a fool if you do get off the old *M'poso* here. The clearing round this Malla-Malla factory is the most fever-ridden spot in the whole of the lower Congo. It always costs me at least four men down in the doctor's hands every time I come here; and if it wasn't that cargo's cargo, and one has to be jolly sharp to nip it up nowadays, I'd never want to see this creek again. Lift up your nose and catch the smell: there's sickness in the air all the time."

I looked over the white rail at the beer-colored river swelling past the steamer's flank. The smell of crushed marigolds which came up from it, was at times strong enough to make me cough. The palmetto thatch of the bamboo-walled factory in the

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clearing was burnt a silver-grey by the sun; and on the tangle of the tropical vegetation beyond, unhealthiness was written everywhere in letters of vivid greenery.

“You’d only get knocked over yourself,” Captain Image went on, “and you’d not do a little dam’ bit of good. I’ve known Wedderburn ever since I’ve been in the West Coast trade, and I can figure out the value of his constitution to half-an-hour. He’s got the best collection of drugs of any man in the Congo Free State; he’s got one room of the factory yonder ram-jam full of bottles which he keeps on tap; and he’s got that hardened, he can take a cigarette-paper full of quinine every two hours and not lose his head for work. But he’s invoiced past all the drugs in Africa this time; he’s got no insides left for them to catch grip on; and if he doesn’t peg out before we’ve finished working his cargo, I’d bet a bottle of fizz he’s not alive by the time we’ve steamed up to Boma. No, Mr. Tollemache, poor Jimmy Wedderburn’s got to go and toe the line in the other place, and all the King’s horses and all the King’s men cannot pull Jimmy round again. It’s a dam’ sad thing, and I suppose we shall see those snuff-and-butter kids of his loafing about the factory till they’re old enough to go off stealing on their own hook. I wonder what’ll become of his wife, though. She’s a nice little piece

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for a Bangala, and if she goes up past the Falls to her own people, they're bound to knock her on the head and chop her. They're all cannibals 'way up there, and she'll be far too rich for them to let alone. Jimmy's been very good to her, and dashed her any amount beyond her regular pay. Why, I suppose that woman, in cloth and nickel bangles, and one thing and another, must be worth quite her twenty-pound note."

"She never went near the factory when I was ashore just now. She was across at her own house under the nut-palm yonder, yawning over the pick-aninnies. It would have looked better if she had been sitting with Wedderburn."

"Oh, Jimmy's very sick," said Captain Image, "and when men are like him, close on the peg-out, they don't want that sort pawing around. They get to thinking about home, and the people there, and they wish every nigger woman they've ever touched was in hell, fathoms deep. Not that I mean to say there's anything wrong with this Bangala girl of his; she has her bath twice a day, and she's sweet, as niggers go; she's not bad-looking; she doesn't steal more than's to be expected; and she can lick a new cook-boy into shape better than any woman I've seen. You should just taste ground-nut soup in Malla-Malla factory, and then you'd know. But then all the chop there is plenty-much-

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fine since she's been in charge, and she can swizzle up a cocktail as good as you want to drink. No, I will say she's made Jimmy a dam' good wife. And he's quite satisfied with her, too. I know he's had lots of offers for her, but he'd never part. Why only the other day a Portugee from the Dutch factory down at Banana—Well, Balgarnie, me lad, what is it?"

The purser had come up, and drew Captain Image aside to talk business, and so I was spared any more gossip about the current Mrs. Wedderburn. But I had quite made up my mind what to do. So I mopped my face with a very wet pocket handkerchief and went below and put three suits of pyjamas into a portmanteau, and left the rest of my kit to be cared for by the steward. Then I went on deck again and waited till the surf boat, then at the bottom of the ladder, should be emptied of its load of kernels and be again paddled across to the beach.

The baking air was full of noise. The steamer was anchored in the smooth, deep river water, a bare hundred yards from the ferns on the bank. The number one winch chain had been sent down, and a manilla rope rove though the derrick sheave in its place, with the cam-hooks bent on to the end. These were dragged ashore by a crew of yelling factory boys managed by the third mate, who tickled

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them with a chiquot. The portly whitewashed puncheons of palm oil were rolled down into the water; the hooks were clipped on to the chines of the casks; the gangway krooboy yelled, and number one winch clattered under a full head of steam. The casks swirled through the yellow water to the pluck of the manilla, hit the *M'poso's* side and climbed it, and were swung in-board, and had been sent below by the crane-chain, and stowed, before the cam-hooks were once more hauled clattering on the beach. The mates sweated and cursed, the kroobois and the factory boys yelled and toiled, and the brazen torrent of sunshine which poured down on the scene was enough to make one sick with its violence.

Captain Image came up again, and ran a finger round inside the collar of his white drill coat. "Well, me lad, you are going one-time I see, in spite of what I've said. I still say you're a fool, but I don't think any the worse of you for it. Jimmy and I have been good friends, and he's always had some cargo for me, when I've called, and I've always dashed him a turkey or a roast of fresh beef out of the refrigerator by way of remembrance. Well, this is the last time, and grub's no use to him. He couldn't keep down the liver wing of an angel with his stomach in the state it is now. And it would be just the same with the best drink that ever filled a man up, or the best cigars a fellow could buy in

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Grand Canary. No, poor Jimmy's got his charter-party made out, with the sixpenny stamp on it all complete, and I know what's the thing he'll want now, and I'm the man that'll do it. He'll have lots of spears and carved tusks, and odds and ends knocking about, and he'll think—if the people at home could have these curios to jam up above the looking-glass in the best room, they'd have something to remember me by,' and then he wouldn't feel so dam' lonely. Foolish you'll say, Tollemarche, me lad, but that's the way these hard cases are when they peg out; and I ought to know; I've seen hundreds of them in my time. Now, you say to Jimmy that Captain Image will take home all he puts out, free of charge (if he'll have them done up in a piece of sacking) and will land them in Liverpool, and put them on the rail for where they've addressed. You tell Jimmy that, me lad, and you'll see he'll give his orders, and have the things sewn up, and then just peg out smiling. I know the ways of the Coast. I've seen fifteen of them put over the side between here and Sarry Leone, and not one but what felt all the comfortabler for knowing he'd fixed things so's his people couldn't forget him."

"You're very kind," I said.

"Not at all," said Captain Image, "I'd do as much for you or anybody I liked. Well, good-bye, me lad, and take three of those pills I gave you

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every morning, and a rousing dose of Eno on top, and I shouldn't wonder but what you'll pull through. Now be off with you; there's the boat empty and waiting; and try and send me word to Boma or Matadi as to how you are getting along."

One of the kroobois sang "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay" as they paddled me ashore, and the sunbeams fell on my pith helmet with such force I could almost feel them hit. One of the great casks had got stoved as it was being trundled down into the water, and the bay of the river, and the third mate, and the working negroes, were all daubed by the orange-colored oil. But above it all the marigold smell of the great river came up stronger than ever.

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### CHAPTER II.

“Do you mean you’ve actually come ashore to this ghastly hole to stay with me?” said Wedderburn from the other side of his mosquito bar. “Well, I do call this good of you. You won’t get any fishing, of course, and the shooting’s more to talk about than find, unless you care to go potting crocodiles at the lagoon in the back. But you wait till I get on my pins again; I’ll be through with this dose of fever in a day or two; and then I’ll show you round myself, and we’ll have a fine time. I wonder if N’gala has remembered to get any whiskey off the steamer. I know we’re nearly out.” He clapped his hands and called “Boy!” He was so weak that the sound scarcely travelled through the gauze of the net which kept the flies from his bed.

“It’s a damned nuisance,” he said, “but my voice has gone. Bilious fever always gets me this way, and I’m on with a sharpish attack just now. Peter’s my house-boy’s name, and he’ll be gossiping down by the surf boats. You might sing out for him and get him to fetch N’gala and see about the whiskey.

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It won't do to be left dry with nothing but trade gin in the place."

I went to the verandah and howled "Peter," and presently the savage who bore that name came trotting up. "You go see Missa," I said, "and you ask her whiskey lib? If whiskey no lib, you tell her she send for case from dem steamah, one-time."

Peter nodded and trotted off to the little house under the nut-palm, vanished inside, and presently re-appeared to go and discuss again the politics of the day on the white beach where the oil-casks were being shipped. A minute or so afterwards N'gala herself came out and walked across the clearing towards me. She was rigged out in a smart blue-and-white check cloth, and had her head shaved in garden plots after the custom of her people.

"Well, have you got that whiskey in the factory?" I asked her.

"Whiskey no lib."

"Have you sent for it, then?"

"Money no lib. Massa Purser say, no get money, no let whiskey come. Feteesh (shop) empty. Massa Purser know it. So he won't let anything come ashore from steamah."

So poor Wedderburn was stone broke, as well as dying. I had not known that. However, I scribbled a note to Balgarnie asking him to send the whiskey and a hamper full of general necessities,

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and debit me with the cost. Then I told N'gala to get the note sent off and went back again to the factory.

Wedderburn was asleep, and when I first looked at him through the filmy curtain, upon my soul, I thought he was dead. Poor beggar! there was nothing of him but parchment and bone, and the pink pyjamas hung about his limbs in shapeless folds. He had had this bilious fever hanging about him for over a month; his stomach was in such a state that he could never keep anything down for ten minutes at a time; and, in unmedical terms, he was dying of sheer starvation. But I could not understand how it was that he should be out of money. He must have been making a good thing out of the factory, and he lived in no sort of style whatever. The whole of his buildings about the place had open-work bamboo walls that the breezes could blow through; they were thatched with herbage; they were floored with mother earth. Even in the two semi-dark rooms in which he lived, one trod upon hard mud, and supped at a packing-case table. The two beds were of sacking, stretched upon four posts driven into the ground. The only items of luxury were a couple of battered Madeira chairs, each well fished with barrel-staves, and crackled by the sun, unless, indeed, one could count in a grey

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parrot which clawed at a perch under the verandah, and was profane in four languages.

The *ménage*, too, was carried on at no expense, for even N'gala was not, economically speaking, a luxury. Her official position was that of house-keeper, and she resented anyone attempting to rob Wedderburn except herself. And the distance of Malla-Malla from any of the larger settlements rendered outlay in food no easy matter. In spite of Image's laudation, I knew that Wedderburn's table seldom saw any flesh except local chickens, which were nasty, and local fish, which were a precious sight worse. He lived for the most part upon yams, bananas, and ground-nuts, and when he did "kill a tin," and riot on the dishes of Europe (very much at second-hand), it distinctly marked a red-letter day.

Presently, however, he opened his eyes again and bid me smoke. "You'll find a tin of 'bacca in that corner yonder, and cigarette papers with it. I'm not well enough to join you myself to-day, but the smell will be cheering. So puff up, and now tell me what's going on at home. Did the Queen run the last Drawing-Room herself, do you recollect?"

I told him the Princess of Wales had presided over the function, so far as my memory served me, and wondered what on earth State Drawing-Rooms in London had got to do with him. I suppose some-

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thing of this must have shown itself in my face, for presently he chuckled and said:

“I’ve got a young sister coming out next year, that’s why I asked, and I’d rather have liked her to make her first kow-tow to Mrs. Great Britain herself, if it could have been managed. I’ve worked pretty hard to that end.”

“Oh, she’s going to be presented, is she?” I said rather feebly.

“Of course. All our women folk always have been, and when the old governor pegged out, and she and I were the only two left, and I’d got her to look after and bring up, I wasn’t going to let her miss her turn, you bet. That’s why I came out here to the Coast. But it’s been the devil of a hard pinch at times. It isn’t half so prosperous when you’re actually bossing a factory here on the spot, as what it looks from a distance.”

“I can understand that.”

“And besides, being ambitious, one has expenses.”

I concluded he was referring to N’gala, and said nothing.

“Old Image seemed to think I was pretty sick,” he went on.

“He hinted that he’d seen healthier men,” I said, for it seemed to me that as the poor fellow might easily die within the hour, it was only right he should have some knowledge of his state.

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"Ah, I know," he said, with a quaint imitation of the skipper's voice. "Inside's just gone to smash, me lad: all the drugs in Africa couldn't pull him through: bet you a bottle of fizz he pegs out before I'm finished working his cargo, me lad. Any bits of rubbish he wants to send home to his folks, you bring 'em along to me, and I'll carry them to Liverpool free of charge." Good old Cappie Image, he's a good sort and he's a bit of a judge, but I think he's wrong this time. I've been precious nearly as bad as this once before, and I pulled round all right. Of course I look a fair wreck now," he added faintly, "but then a diet of weak mustard and water isn't stimulating, and my tummy's got to be scoured down to the bare bone till it's fit for service again."

"Will you just try a little soda and Swiss milk?"

"No use. I'll just have a nap by way of a refresher. But I'll tell you what; you might do me a favor if you would. Just go and see that the steamer's tally's the same as mine, allowing, of course, for that cask that got staved. It's quite simple to follow; only oil and kernals; I've no rubber for them this time. But Balgarnie will bear looking after; he always like to pick up an odd cask or an odd bag or two when he can, so as to square other people's breakages. He's the best purser on

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the Coast for seeing after the interests of his Company."

I went out of the factory then, and did the arithmetic on the beach, to Balgarnie's annoyance. The cargo was nearly all shipped, but the work never slackened. On the contrary, it went on more furiously than ever, and Captain Image was ubiquitous, and urged all concerned with threats, promises and gin. Navigation by night is forbidden on the Congo; his next place of call was a bare dozen miles away; and if he could steam there before darkness fell, he could work cargo by electric light, and so save another day. Presently the last of the great white casks was heaved on board, and only two boat-loads of kernels remained. The mate and the carpenter were both on the fore-deck, and the clacking of the windless told that the order had been given to "heave short." And presently the last of the kernels were swung up to the derricks, the anchor was broken out of the ground, the propeller sent up the smell of crushed marigolds more keenly than ever into the air, and the *M'poso* was under weigh.

I exchanged helmet-waves with her, and went to the verandah and busied myself with the freightage accounts; and there I was when an hour later the sun, after a final blare from over the tree tops, slid out of sight, and night came down like the shutting of a box.

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The moist stew of heat grew, if anything, more oppressive. The night mists began to crawl in filmy earth-smelling layers from out the recesses of the trees. And the factory boys either supped in tired silence or slept on the floor of their shelter with heads wrapped up to keep off the ghosts. But in the little house under the nut-palm a paraffin lamp glowed brightly, and with the two snuff-and-butter-colored children by her side, N'gala crooned to them what she had picked up of the classic "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay."

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### CHAPTER III.

“OH, Tollemache!”

I left the verandah and went inside to the bedroom.

“I saw you,” he said, “through the chinks in the bamboos. Had any chop yet?”

“No, it’s too hot. The boy came and offered to cook me something just now, but I said I’d wait till it got cooler. Will you have anything?”

“Well, if you put it that way, old man, I will. I’ll have an opinion off you. Am I going to pull round, or am I going to peg out?”

“Oh,” I said rather confusedly, “we’ll hope for the best.”

“That’s skittles! Look here, Tollemache, I’ve got my own notions on the subject, and if yours don’t agree with mine, I tell you frankly I shan’t believe you. It would be too dangerous. It’s this way, you see; when a man is sick out here, and gets it into his head that he’s going to die, he mostly does it. You grasp my way of looking at the matter?”

“Certainly. It’s an excellent way.”

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“Yes, but in two words, what’s your candid opinion?”

“Well, if you insist on my being brutal, I’m afraid, I’m very much afraid——”

“That’ll do, Dick, you needn’t go on. You think I’m booked this journey beyond a doubt. But, as I’ve warned you, I’m not going to chuck up. I’m going to try on, and try on, and let somebody say I’m dead when I’m stiff and cold. Oh—my God, Dick, if you only knew how I want to live! It is too damned hard that—after festering in this foul swamp among these savages all these years—I should get bowled over just when I was ready to go home and be able to live again. And then there’s *Sylvia*——” He broke off abruptly, and through the gauze curtain I saw him squirming upon the bed.

I coughed and blew my nose. I seemed to want to just then. “Ahem, er—about your wife, if there is anything I could—I mean I should be awfully pleased if——”

“My wife, man?”

“You said something about *Sylvia*.”

“Oh! that’s my young sister. She’ll be all right. She’s living with a cousin who’ll see to her being presented, and all that. Yes, with any decent luck *Sylvia* can’t fail to come through all right. But I did so want to see her. She’s pretty, and she’s tak-

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ing, and when I've been trying to sleep out here in the hot nights, I've pictured her to myself when she's just in her prime, with all the young fellows after her, and she with the ball at her feet. And I've promised myself I'd be about in the odd corners to watch it all; and see she didn't get hold of the wrong man; and back her up, like only a brother who's been through the mill himself can do. And now——” he broke off again, and twisted his fingers together, “tell me, Dick, don't you think I've got—well, say a thousand to one chance?”

“I'm no doctor,” I said, “I'm only a friend who wishes you well. But you'd be doing no harm if you settled any affairs that you have that want looking after, in case——”

“You're right there,” he said, “right all the way. Peg out or live, I've got something here that mustn't be left to the off-chance. You're the only man I've got to trust, Dick, and I'm going to show you what no human being has ever seen before. I've got a thing up my sleeve that'll bring in a fortune. I've spent years working it out; it's cost me nearly every penny that I did not send home to Sylvia; and I've lived the greater part of my time here on native chop so as to have more money for buying the tackle I wanted. It's a miracle; it'll make a blooming revolution, and Sylvia's to have the money. I've got to rely on your honor for that.”

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"Oh, I'm all right," I said gruffly. "I'm not a brute."

"Thanks, old man, I knew you'd help. But you must see it first before we go any further. My workshop's the next room to this. The padlock-combination 417. Get out the machine, and try it in the open; no one will see you."

"Some of the factory boys may be about, if they count?"

"Everybody counts. But I forget. Ring the bell on the handle and they'll scuttle to cover like scared rabbits. I've impressed on them that that machine, and everything connected with it, is plenty-much *ju-ju*, and that they'll die one-time if ever they catch so much as a glimpse of it. One chap did see it by accident, once, and by Jove, he pegged out next day out of sheer funk. Nothing like a profound belief in *ju-ju* for keeping an invention untampered with hereabouts."

"Very well," I said. "Now look here, let's make a bargain. You're getting over-excited. Lie back on the pillow again and get another nap, and I'll go out and inspect your apparatus thoroughly, and be here again in an hour to report."

"Ten minutes will be plenty."

"Call it half an hour, then. Man, you must rest. Jumping about like that is as good as committing suicide straight off."

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We struck a bargain over the matter, and I went out on to the verandah. The Bengala woman was still rehearsing her new classic in the little house beneath the nut-palm; a quartette of factory boys were chattering under the long shed; and here and there about the clearing, mist wreaths crawled like blue-grey snakes along the bare, uneven ground. Ever and again a great splash of noiseless heat-lightning blazed out in the black heavens above the great river, and showed the islands, and the forests, and the beer-colored water, all tinted clear as day.

I went along the verandah and took hold of the padlock, and cursed the niggers' ingenuity in "picking," which, in that part of Africa, has made key-locks impossible to use. I had forgotten the combination. But in a minute the figures came to me again, and with wet hands I waited for a lightning-flash, and turned the cylinders into place. The lock opened and the door fell back. Inside was a mechanic's shop. Against the end wall was stacked—ye gods—a bicycle!

The lightning went out for a minute, and I stood staring at the inky dark. I must have made a mistake. No, there it was! And such a machine! The most curious, cumbersome bicycle that was probably ever built. But for all that, it was a quaint parody on the very latest type of machine which I had seen not a month ago in London parks.

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I drew it to the door-way, and the light flashed on a bell at the handle-bar, and brought up a memory. I rang the bell, and the result startled me. From the factory boys' shed came a rustle as of heads being thrust under blankets, and then a silence like death. The song in the little house beneath the nut-palm stopped in the middle of a bar, and the light from the paraffin lamp was shut off in an instant. Only the noises of the forest behind, and the hum of the insects, and the drone of the great river, as it swirled along its weary road, were left to people the clearing. I mounted the machine and rode all round the rim of the jungle. It was heavy, it creaked and buckled, it was hard to steer, but it carried me with a curious softness. I saw what had happened and a new pain grew at my heart. This lonely exile had re-invented something that had been making fortunes in the British Islands ever since he had left them.

But as I rode there over that savage ground, beneath the sweltering African night, I thought I saw what was demanded of me, and I made up my mind to lie if it came to the question, as only a man should lie when there is no other way of helping a friend to die in peace.

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### CHAPTER IV.

“WELL?” said Wedderburn, when I went into the room again, “you’ve seen the thing? What do you think of the invention?”—His eyes were curiously bright, and they shone out of his pinched face like stars. His voice had grown weak and tremulous—“Won’t it make a revolution in cycling?”

“Yes,” I said.

“You are not enthusiastic, and the clumsiness of the machine deceives you. But that is only a rough model. I’m a rotten mechanic. The thing you saw is merely to give the general idea. Oh, Lord, Dick, if you only knew how I toiled at it; if you could only understand how I built up the notion, step by step, and drew plans with the sweat dropping from my face on to the paper. I’ve had the idea gurgling in my head for years, and now it’s carried out, and it’s perfect. I don’t care what you say, it’s perfect. And it’s got to be patented and bring in a fortune for me and Sylvia. Dick, I wouldn’t take a hundred thousand pounds for that invention.”

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I could speak with sincerity here: "It's worth all that," I said, "and more."

"I'm not letting figures dazzle me," said Wedderburn.

"Man alive," I cried, "once get these pneumatic tires on the market, and everybody who uses a machine is bound to have a pair, let them cost what they may."

"'Pneumatic tires,' Dick, that's a good name, better than the title I'd thought of. I owe you one for that. And is bicycling very popular at home now?"

"They all go in for it."

"But only the bounders?"

"No, even the decent people. It's the latest craze."

"And they submit to having their insides jolted up by the little narrow tires, same as they used to six years ago?"

I told the lie without a quaver. "Same jolt," I said.

"It's marvellous, marvellous. And to think that no one has picked up the idea before, and it's mine, mine, all my very own. Pneumatic tires! Yes, that's a good name for them, and I'm the sole and original inventor: no others need apply. Dick, I believe you're right, after all, and I'm going to peg

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out. I suppose there'll be no legal objection to Sylvia taking out the patent in her own name?"

"None whatever."

"She isn't of age, of course; she's just seventeen; her birthday was the day before yesterday, but that could be got over?"

"Oh, easily," I said, "trustees."

"Of course, yes, trustees. You and some lawyer man. Pick one who won't cheat her, Dick."

"I'll get the safest in Britain."

"Had your chop yet, Dick?"

"No, couldn't eat anything. Too hot."

"You old fool, you were worrying about me—You're a good sort, Dick—And you and Cappie Image were right—I'm booked through this trip. Everything's all gone dark, and I can't see half the lightning when it comes now. But, Dick, isn't it a fine thing for Sylvia? One hundred blooming thousand pounds at least, and more, you think."

"Sylvia will be an heiress, with all the men in England running after her."

"And no one to see after her and to throw in an occasional hint. Look here, Dick. You're going home soon?"

"In another six months."

"Well, you must take the bicycle then, and patent it for her, and look after her. I'll write and say—no, I can't now. You write, Dick, and tell her she

## THE INVENTOR.

isn't to be presented till you come back. Tell her I say so, and then she'll do it. And tell her I want her to do pretty much as you advise. You will see to her, Dick, won't you? She's such a kid. Only just seventeen."

A quavering hand dived slowly under the mosquito bar and grasped mine. I took it in my fingers and pressed it gently. I did not feel quite able to speak.

"Good sort, Dick."

The hand hung listlessly in mine.

"What time is it?"

"Morning. Three o'clock."

"That's why it's getting so cold then. Cover yourself up, Dick. There's a silk handkerchief.—Tie it around your middle or else—you'll get chills in your tummy and invent rheumatic tires—and cut out Sylvia and the lawyer—Oh what skittles I'm talking—and it—it isn't—I say, Dick."

"Yes, old man."

"You'll be sure—and see—she—gets that money?"

"Every penny," I said loudly. But I do not think he heard. Of a sudden his hand grew curiously heavy in mine, and when I let it go, it fell with a thud against the earthen floor.

I sat back and mopped my face on a sleeve. The lightning had ceased, and the night was at its black-

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est. The air was almost chill. It was just before the dawn.

From the other side of the clearing, near the river bank, there came a dozen bars of "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," and then once more silence. I think the Bangala woman had been singing in her sleep.

# **The Sole Survivor.**



# The Sole Survivor.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**T**HREE’S something pretty badly wrong with that steam trawler,” I said.

The jet miner who had been showing me through the workings which honey-combed the cliff face, came out into the open beside me, and braced himself against the gale. “Looks like it,” said he, staring down at the little iron box, which jolted about in the boil of sea below. “Her propeller’s stopped, that’s certain.”

“It looks to me as though that steam was coming up through her engine-room skylight.”

“Maybe it is, sir,” said the jet miner, “though her decks is swept that often I wouldn’t be sure. She’s making heavy weather of it—is that a big dog aft there by the funnel, or is it a couple of men?”

## THE SOLE SURVIVOR.

"Well, that point out yonder's a lee shore for her, and she'll be on it within the next five minutes, as sure as God made rocks, if they don't get steam on her again. It's their own fault; they shouldn't have come so close."

"Oh, that's all right," said the jet miner. "The steam road down here from the Geordie ports, north, makes for Whitby Rock; and to pick up Whitby Rock, you don't clear the point yonder by much more than half a mile." He jerked his thumb to the caves behind us. "She'll have drifted in off her course whilst we were in them holes. We don't know how long she's been broke down. It is a dog there aft that funnel, isn't it?"

"Yes," said I, "it's a dog right enough, a big yellowy-brown dog, and he must be pretty snugly made fast, or he'd have been washed overboard before this. I've seen three big seas souse over him."

The jet miner pressed a hand tightly in front of his eyes and then stared out again into the gale. "By the Lord," he said, "if it's the dog I'm thinking of, all the poor beggars down there on that trawler are as good as dead."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said I; "but if that trawler doesn't mend her engines, and start to claw off shore, this next minute or so, her people will want a lot of help, if they're going to slip out with their lives."

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The jet miner shook his head. On the trawler a man handed himself along the streaming decks, swung into the main rigging, and cautiously made his way up the ratlines. Half way up he halted, twined himself into a securer hold, and began to fumble with something; and presently he slipped down a couple of ratlines lower and began to fumble in another place. Then he went to the deck again, and left behind him, lashed to the rigging, a grimy red ensign blowing out stiff as a sheet of tin.

“By Jove!” I shouted; “that tells you what’s happened. Look! there’s their ensign in the rigging, jack downwards. Now let’s get a move on ourselves if we don’t want to sit here and see the poor devils drown. There’s a rocket station up there in the village, isn’t there?”

“It’s just past the cliff head,” said the jet miner. “I’ll go and fetch the rocket cart and the men. No, it’s no use both going. It’s no use either going, for that matter. You stay here, on watch, sir. It’s time somebody else knew about that dog besides us chaps that lives by the shore. I’m sure it’s the same dog now.”

“What foolery are you talking?”

“Well,” he said, “you wouldn’t believe me if I was to tell you yet, and I only hope you won’t see yourself afterwards.” And with that he set off run-

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ning over the old jet workings towards the little village that stood up against the tearing North Sea gale, high up on the cliff head above us.

The man's constant harping about the dog, and indeed his talk generally, had been, to say the least of it, queer; and for a moment I had half a mind to go with him and see that he gave the alarm correctly. But looking up to the heights above, I caught sight of half a dozen other people staring down at the trawler, and guessed that some of them had already sent tidings to the rocket station. So I stayed where I was, and faced round seaward again just in time to see the poor little vessel strike for the first time.

The tide was nearly at the top of flood; the beach beneath it (as those who know the coast will remember) was of shale slabs, smooth and hard as a street pavement. The trawler rode into the shallow zone on the back of a great, yeasty, churning sea, sank down as the water rolled from under her, and hit the ground with a clangor and a quivering which reminded me of an empty meat-tin kicked about in a street by boys. She rose to the next wave also, and surged further in. But the sea that followed made a clean breach over her, and in its white boil there bobbed about a black, struggling thing that represented a man. I was perched three hundred feet above him, and as helpless to interfere

## THE SOLE SURVIVOR.

as the scurrying clouds above us both, and I watched him with a strange, cold fascination. It was the first time I had ever seen a human being drown.

To every tearing sea that drove in against the cliff-foot, the trawler banged and writhed and clashed. Her funnel, her bridge and mizzen-mast, her bulwarks, and all her deck hamper, were torn away as feathers are plucked from a fowl. Her bottom was beaten in, and below decks she was full of water. And when at last the man who was drowning away by himself had been fairly sucked from sight by the undertow, and I drew my eyes away and looked at what was left of the trawler, there were only four men remaining on her, and it was hard to tell whether even they were alive.

They were laying upon the steaming decks, with their hands gripped on the main sheet horse, mere limp wisps of humanity that flickered in the constant douches of water like uncouth ribands of seaweed. They were covered out of sight about half the time, and (as I say) it was not easy to be sure whether they still lived, or whether they had been battered and choked to death.

Only one thing on the trawler's deck showed vigorous life, and that was the great yellow dog. On him the lurid greys of the sky, the yelping of the gale, the fierce scouring of the seas, and the immi-

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inent nearness of violent death, seemed to have no effect. To my surprise I saw that he was not tethered by either rope or chain. When first I looked, he seemed in some way or other to be made fast to the combing of the engine-room skylight. But a sea tore that away: he bounded along the decks, shaking himself as he ran; and when the next wave rolled up, I made sure he would be swept helplessly away.

The thought came almost pleasantly: somehow or another, a queer antipathy for the beast was growing within me. But when the sea drained away, there was he, shaking the water clear from his ears and flanks, and before the next hill of liquid came down, I saw him deliberately hook his great forepaws into the life-rail, and brace himself for a coming shock.

But meanwhile the news of what was happening had flown amongst the scattered houses on the cliff-head far quicker than the jet miner could have carried it. I heard shouts behind me, and turned to look. The Board of Trade rocket cart, with a ponderously-galloping plough-horse between the shafts, was lumbering down the slopes over the disused jet workings. A mob of men, children, and women, trotted by its side, or trailed out in a queue behind, bending almost double to make headway

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against the violence of the wind. A fat coastguardsman in oilskins seemed to be in command.

They came down past where I had taken my stand, and passed on some twenty yards further along the brink of the lower cliff till they had come directly opposite to the wreck, which lay some three hundred feet below them. The plough-horse was halted, and stood gasping; the rocket cart was raidied of its contents by men who knew exactly what to do; the rocket-trough straddled up on its tripod; the boxes of line were opened and the pegs withdrawn from the accurate coils. But below on the trawler, in that raging cauldron of waters, the four men still hung on like dead things to the main sheet horse.

A rocket was shipped in the trough and the fat coastguardsman bent on the line and busied himself with the aiming. Then he took a port fire, struck it, lit the fuse, and stepped back. The rocket fizzed, sent out a fiery tail, and took a sudden swoop towards the lurid horizon. The line snaked out in its train, sagging into a curve before the wind. But a sudden freak of the gale swept the fiery messenger from its course; it lunged to this side and to that, and finally flopped into the surf in a pother of steam not a dozen yards from the wreck's shattered bulwark.

But if the shot missed its aim, it cannot be said to have been wasted. One of the draggled men

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hanging on to the iron bar seemed to wake up. He shook his neighbors, and seemed to tell them that men ashore were attempting their rescue. And with stiffness and weakness, three of them watched their opportunity, and one by one got up and made for the main rigging. The fourth man they tried to rouse, but he showed no movement. He was already dead.

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### CHAPTER II.

As perhaps was natural, the men showed no particular care for the dog. And the dog, apparently none the worse by what he had gone through, seemed quite able to look after himself. So soon as the first man had got into the rigging and was making his way to the main crosstrees, the dog followed him, hooking his great forepaws to the ratline, and climbing with almost an ape's cleverness.

And then came a very horrible thing. Man number two followed, and the three of them—the two humans and the brute—balanced themselves on the narrow perch at the head of the mast, with little enough room to spare. For the third man (a weakly enough man by his way of moving) there was obviously no room whatever. But either because he was too exhausted to hang on to the ratlines, or because the crosstrees seemed to him a haven of comparative safety, he tried to scramble up to join the others. The two men already in possession made no effort either to help him, or to thrust him back; but the dog time after time repulsed him with in-

## THE SOLE SURVIVOR.

creasing violence, driving him away by both paws and muzzle; and at last as the man persisted, bared his great teeth, and bit him savagely.

The fellow seemed numbed by the attack, and dropped limply backwards; the shrouds to which he clung were continually tautening and slackening as the seas scoured over the wreck beneath; and bit by bit his hold was loosened. Finally, by one of the more violent movements, his limp hands were plucked from the ratlines and he fell to the deck, and was washed out of sight by the next sea.

The jet miner had come up beside me, and together we dumbly looked on at the tragedy. When it was over, he shook his fist down at the wreck, and swore venomously at the dog.

“Are they friends of yours on board?” I asked.  
“Why didn’t you say so before?”

“The trawler I never saw before, sir. All the poor beggars on her are strangers to me.”

“But you seem to know the dog, anyway.”  
“Oh, yes,” he said moodily. “I know that cursed hound. There’s precious few on this coast doesn’t. But there’s no use me telling you about it yet. You’d only laugh and no believe. You wait a bit, sir, and you’ll see for yourself. It’s daylight and there’s nothing hid. It’s generally been night before when we’ve had wrecks here, and so the darkness has covered up most of his beastly work. But

## THE SOLE SURVIVOR.

there's men on the coast has seen him kill many a shipwrecked man, and it's a fact that on the last three vessels that have gone ashore in this bay, that dog's been aboard, and was the only living thing to come to the sod."

"Oh, rubbish," I said.

The jet miner shrugged his shoulders. "Of course you've been here to see them all, sir."

"Well, anyway, it was chance."

"Darned ugly chance, that's all I can say," retorted the jet miner. "Now they're going to shoot another rocket. Look!"

The fat coastguardsman stood beside the rocket-trough and peered out into the gale, looking for a lull. Twice he lifted the port fire, to send the rocket off on its errand, and twice he scented another heavier gust of wind, and held his hand. Then he fired the fuse, and the rocket swooped out. It flew with a low trajectory; it passed to seaward ahead of the wreck; but the sagging line made fast to it, and its tail drifted before the heavy blast of the gale, and fell on the trawler's foredeck and fouled her windlass.

The mob beside the rocket cart sent up shouts of success; the men on the crosstrees below seemed in altercation. But presently—and it might have been imagination, but I could have sworn that the great yellow dog shoved him—one of them left his perch

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and climbed down deckwards; watched his chance as a sea ebbed away, and splashed down and got the rope; then put the bight of it over his shoulder, and climbed back to the crosstrees.

Ashore the excitement now was vivid enough to be painful. The rocket crew were (so to speak) fishing for men's lives. They had got a bite. Could they land their catch? To the rocket line they bent on hawser and whip, and stood by to pay them out. On the crosstrees on the wreck the two men braced themselves against the lower masthead and hauled in hand over fist; and the heavy rope went swaying out over the gulf.

It was a tough pull at the finish, but they did it. Exhausted they might be, but when a man is working for his bare life he can always put on a little extra strain. And so they brought home the end of the hawser and made it fast just above the middle peak block. Ashore, eager hands manned the whip, and the breeches buoy went hopping merrily down the slanting rope. And then on the crosstrees of the wreck there commenced a curious struggle. It was not as to which man could get in first; it was a contest between two men and the dog; and the dog won. The great shambling brute got into the breeches buoy as soon as it touched his refuge, and with open champing jaws resisted all efforts to dislodge him.

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Round the rocket cart we men were clenching our fists with impotent fury.

"Why don't they knife him?" I cried.

"Knife the devil," said the jet miner contemptuously. "See there! See that fellow throw up his hand? That means we're to haul up what we've got, and send the buoy back for them. Well, I hope the mast'll hold, but I don't think it. The poor old trawler's bottom's beat out by this, and the mast step's gone, and the mast may topple any moment now. See the way it sways!"

The coastguard and his men had manned the other whip, and the breeches buoy came cliffwards in great lusty swings. The hawser kept getting slack. The mast to which it was stayed jerked about with drunken lurches.

The breeches buoy was brought up to the triangle on the cliff head, and for a moment most eyes were turned on the dog. A larger and more powerful brute I don't think I ever looked upon. It was something like a brindled Russian boar hound, but it wasn't that quite. In fact it was like no breed I ever saw before, but it was powerful enough to have dragged down a cart horse.

Its reception was none of the most cordial. The women and children had run, and the men stood round, each with a weapon of some sort in his hand. But the dog faced us with a snarl, and a show of

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teeth, and I saw that there was blood on his chops.

A cry from one of the women. "Look! the mast's gone!"

We turned and looked. The hawser's end was drifting loosely in the boil of sea; the wreck had collapsed; the two men were swept away into eternity. And then a glow of murderous rage filled us, and we turned against the dog. But the great brute burst from the savage ring that hemmed him in, and made for one of the open workings of the jet mine. We guarded all the outlets and sent for guns and candles. And then we went in after him, fully determined to slay, for it was not right that a beast who has bought his life at the price of a man's should live. But though we searched through every yard of the caves, never a glimpse of that great brindled hound did we ever catch again, and we came out into the gathering dusk of the evening chilled, and tired, and dispirited.

I trudged back to my lodgings with the jet miner. On the way we did not exchange a single word, but when we were going to part he nodded at me several times with significance.

"My friend," I said, "I owe you apologies. I believe now all you told me about that dog's doings before. Heaven grant that I may never meet it again."

"Amen to that," said the jet miner. "But I wish I could think this coast was quit of him."

**A Western Ocean  
Christmas Box.**



# A Western Ocean Christmas Box.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE other steamer lay a hundred fathoms off, rolling heavily and wetly over the big, cold Atlantic rollers, her decks and rigging and superstructure laid out in patterns with icicles and snow. Captain Evans watched her from the Zion Chapel's upper bridge with a face that was beetroot red from pride and exultation. He saw a vision of himself as landlord of a snug public house, and an old age softly provided for.

His find was just the one thing which merchant skippers sigh after all their lives afloat, and ask for with earnestness in any prayer which they may offer up during interludes ashore. Or rather, to be accurate, it was even more than that; for the majority of master mariners never dare to supplicate the Sea

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

Fates which direct traffic on the great waters for the one supreme gem of all their boons.

The ordinary skipper in his devout moments thinks with pride over past good deeds, and singles out as his reward the finding of a vague something in the steamer line, with engines comfortably broken down, and with crew or (more especially) a sprinkling of passengers still on board. It is his dream of bliss to drag such a craft into port at the end of a new steel hawser, and reap kudos backed by a cheque for anything over £400. And he would think it drawing too heavily on his luck (and in fact savoring of grasping impertinence) to sigh for anything greater. Yet here, without daring to even dream that such a prize would ever be his, the fates had delivered into Captain Evans' hands not only the steamer of his hopes, but one which, moreover, was deserted by all breathing life, an abandoned derelict which was drifting about through a North Atlantic snow gale, as a danger to navigation, and a gold mine for the man who contrived to carry her home.

Captain Evans did not faint before the magnificence of his windfall, because the knowledge of it was brought home to him by degrees. He had picked up the derelict first with his own eyes, had nearly run her down in fact, as he stood on the Zion Chapel's upper bridge with his second mate, whilst Christmas morning broke grey and dreary through

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

the Western Ocean snow clouds. At first he did not know that she was deserted; but with helm hard ported, brought his little old tramp round in a wallowing circle, and first hooted cheerfully with his steam syren, and then hailed with his voice to offer assistance. But on the other steamer not a soul appeared. The crash of the seas beating on the rust-streaked sides made her only answering sound.

“Ho!” mused the skipper gleefully as he telegraphed to stop the engines. “So they’ve left her; and that means there’s something pretty wrong; and those two empty lifeboats davits show how they went. Can’t say she looks much amiss, though.”

Then he turned and gave orders, and his own dingy life boat was swung outboard with clumsiness, and got into the water, and rowed across the churning seas by three very ragged sailormen. The mate was steering, and the mate it was who, watching his chance, clambered on board the derelict by a pendant davit-fall. Then after passing the boat astern so that she might ride clear at the end of her painter, he disappeared into the chart-house and once more the derelict’s snowy decks were tenantless.

It was at this moment that the chief came up from his engine-room and gave Captain Evans cold shivers through all his newly warmed nerves.

“Aweel,” he said, “it seems to me ye figured it ower cannie aboot the coal after all, captain. If ye’d been

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

led by me when ye bunkered her, we might ha' plucked yon great white beast home along wi' oursel's; but noo I'm thinking she's only a cauld white elephant which we'll ha' no use for."

"My great glory!" cried Evans, "you don't mean that, McFee?"

"I see too dam' little humor in the thing to jest aboot it," retorted the chief sourly. "It's just siller ott o' my ain pouch, this meanness of yours, as I telled ye it might weel be when ye forbade me take my proper whack of coal on board in Norfolk, Virginia. It'll use up all my time to find the steam that'll carry the little tub home by hersel'." He pointed a grimy finger at the derelict. "There's my old age pension waiting to be picked up off yon steamboat, and it's got to be left behind. But," he added venomously, "it's some sma' comfort to ken that yon bit o' plunder has been dangled before your een and then plucked away just the same." Mr. McFee snorted, and had more to add, but the cold was making him shiver, so he spat on the wheel grating, and clattered off to the more congenial warmth of his own station below.

The skipper lifted no head against these insults; the facts crushed him; and the outlines of the dreamed-of public house faded into dreary mists of poverty. The coal war between himself and his chief engineer was a feud of long standing. The Scot had

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

a weakness for pace, and a liking to see his engines do justice to themselves, so that he might boast about performances afterwards. The Welchman was a shareholder in the Zion Chapel—to be accurate, he held two sixty-fourths of her—and in every ton of coal expended saw his meagre profits encroached upon. He ran the boat on a starvation allowance of fuel; habitually steamed her into port on the sweepings of her bunkers; and now he had to suffer for it. With so much as a hen-coop towing behind to impede him he could not have brought the Zion Chapel up to Cardiff docks.

But meanwhile Mr. Cecil Hall, the mate, had been making his rapid survey of the derelict. The mate was a young man of the newer school, ambitious, moderately intellectual, and in a way well read in the matters relating to his profession. This was his first trip as mate with steam—or as “Chief Officer,” as he preferred to name the position—and he was thirsting to distinguish himself. He came back with his boat flying, climbed the Jacob’s ladder with an ape’s quickness, and swung himself on to the upper bridge in four strides.

“She’s as sound as a bottle, sir,” he burst out; “machinery laden; and I can’t make out that there’s a thing wrong with her engines. She’s been swept pretty badly, and I should judge that her cargo shifted, and she got hove down on her beam ends,

## 'A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

and her people left her because they thought she'd turn turtle altogether. And then when they'd gone, I suppose she righted herself again. She's a new two-thousand-ton ship by Harland and Wolff, and with what's in her she must be worth altogether £150,000."

The captain shook his head heavily. "But the Zion can't tow her, my lad. We've only enough coal to just get in ourselves."

"Oh, damn the old Methody," rapped out the mate, and then added quickly, "Beg pardon, sir, I didn't mean that. But look here, give me another deck-hand to take trick and trick with me at the wheel, and put me a crew of two in the engine room and six in the stoke hold, and I'll hawk her into the Bute docks by myself."

"By glory!" said Captain Evans, "I never thought of sending her along under her own steam." He rubbed a paw before his eyes. "By glory, it sounds too good to be true. What goats they must ha' been to ha' left such a vessel. She don't look so very full of water either."

"There aren't ten pints in her," replied the mate. "I saw to that. Shall I muster the hands aft, sir, and ask who'll come with me?"

"Don't you bustle a man so, my lad," said the skipper. "I must think that through a bit. By the way, what ship is she? Her funnel's that masked with

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snow I can't make her out, unless she is one of those new Grey and Swithenbank boats that they put steam cranes on the forward deck of, and"—

"She's the Cykros, sir," the mate put in impatiently.

"What!" yelled the skipper.

"Cykros, port of Hull."

"My God! and Dick was her master!" said Evans, and fell to gnawing his thumb nail.

"Friend of yours, sir?"

"He married my daughter, Mr. Hall, and she's all I've got. He's had three kids by her, and they've neither insurance nor a sixpence put by."

"Dear me!" said the mate, "that's a desperate bad job. Shall I begin to get together a crew to take over with me, sir?"

"Poor Dick Morgan!" said the skipper, "Lose his ship this way, and as good as done for whether he's drowned or not! There'll never be another penny of wage come to his hands in this world. But look you now, what a blazing old dog-fish I must have been ever to let my girl marry a sailor. Well, I'll have to keep her now; yes, and the kids, too. It'll be a tight fit."

"I suppose you couldn't let me have Mr. McFee, sir?" suggested the mate thoughtfully. "The second engineer would be all right here because he knows this ship, but he'd be a good deal adrift amongst new

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

machinery. You see he's only just left the shops to come to sea."

"Poor Polly," mused Evans, "there's some hardish times ahead for you."

"You can be rich enough, sir," said the mate sharply, "to retire from the sea altogether, and set up Mrs. Morgan with a pony and chaise if you'll only give me permisison to carry that steamboat home and put her into a salvage agent's hands. She's a thing not one sailor man in ten million comes across —a sound derelict—and she can fill our pockets, and get us paragraphs in the newspapers, and bring us in the way of berths that are a sight different to knocking about in a little tin-pot tramp like this blessed Methody. Come, sir, remember me if you won't think of yourself: I'm a man that's got to get on."

Captain Evans pulled himself together. "You're right, matey," he said, "though you're a tolerable beast in your way of putting it. The best thing we can do for my girl and Dick's kids is to take his steamer home and put dirt on Dick's name forever and ever, Amen. You're fond of newspaper paragraphs, Mr. Hall? Well, I'll give you one that'll make a good many people feel sick. 'Cowardly desertion by a British captain'—that's how it'll be headed. 'Left his ship because she got a few inches of list on her,' some inky fingered office boy will

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write. 'Bolt on his bloomin' profession. Beggar drowned, and serve him jolly well right. Wife and kids deserve no pity : they shouldn't have been hitched on to such a white-livered tailor.' Buy a paper, Captain ? Speshull !'

"Oh, come now," said the mate, "it won't be as bad as that. You trust me, sir. I'll get hold of the newspaper bug when he comes off, and I'll fill him up till he doesn't know which end of his pencil's sharpened. I know exactly how the thing ought to be put so as to look best for all of us, and it's my yarn that'll get into the papers, not his fancy tale."

Evans shook his head gloomly, but he followed up the subject no further. "Call the crew aft," he said, "and let's get you packed off toward your gold watch and illuminated address." And Mr. Cecil Hall, the mate, with a joyful face put a whistle to his lips, and let the word leak out that all volunteers would be given the wherewith to lay out a solid six months' spree in Cardiff.

## A WESTERN OCEAN CHRISTMAS BOX.

### CHAPTER II.

IT was Cecil Hall, acting master of the *Cykros*, who first saw the two life-boats struggling eastwinds under close-reefed lugs, but it was the *Zion Chapel* which picked them up. The *Cykros* held steadily on her course, replying nothing to their frantic signals. It was the little tramp which slowed, got them alongside, hoisted them on to her rusty iron main-deck, and then steamed gaspingly on again towards the east. The life-boats contained the former crew of the *Cykros*, wet, draggled, and ill, but alive all of them, and stirred with a large variety of emotions.

Captain Evans left a German quartermaster on the bridge, with instructions to keep as near to the *Cykros'* taffrail as might be, and then went into the chart-house, where his son-in-law lay stretched out on a sofa-locker. Evans produced whiskey, and they both gulped down strong nips, but for a long time neither of them spoke. It was the older man who first let loose his thoughts aloud.

“By glory, Captain, but it's a bad job,” he said.

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"About the cruellest bad job ever invented, Captain," returned the other moodily.

"But it's got to be faced, Captain."

"That is so, Captain."

And once more the talk withered up in them. Evans produced moist black cigars, at which they both puffed feverishly, till the little chart-house was built in with biting smoke, but even these didn't bring them ideas which could be spoken aloud. Indeed, Morgan had no definite thoughts in his head at all, except an occasional fancy for then and there shooting himself. But the elder man was planning busily. At length he spoke again:

"Look here, Dick," he said, "she's my daughter, and her and her kids are about all I've got to care about. If you can't look after them alone, I've got to help you. How much money have you got?"

"Call it nothing," said Morgan drearily. "Nothing to speak of, at any rate."

"But you must have money! Look you, there's just a chance to pull you out of the ditch yet, but money'll be wanted to work it. Remember, it's your professional life you have to save; and now, say, what is every sixpence you can ante up to do it?"

Captain Morgan considered awhile. "I believe I could lay my hands on all of fifty pounds."

"No more? You must have more."

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"I might screw seventy ; not a cent more than that, even by selling the bonnet off Polly's head."

"Well, and I can add a hundred to it, and with that one-seventy we've got to square McFee and the mate, and the rest of my crew. What about your own crowd?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand your game."

"Never mind that yet. If I shut the mouths of my lot, and set you all back aboard your ship, can you keep your beggars from talking?"

"Can I, by God?" cried Morgan, with a glow of fury. "Do you think the swine would want to talk? I can't have told you right the way they treated me. When the mess came, there wasn't a man with me in the ship who'd kept his head. I know things looked ugly. There was a hard blow on us, and a pig of a sea running, and the machinery cases below had got adrift and took charge. They were kicking up a noise like ten boiler-shops all hammering at once; and, of course, no one could go near to get anything made fast again. And then she began to list to starboard; and, of course, the heavy stuff all piled up there, and some fool said it would smash through the skin of her, and down she'd go like a stone. And after that, there was no holding any of them, from the mates down to the captain's dog.

"I'll admit things looked about as bad as they

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could do; but there's nothing new in that. A man who goes to sea claps his eyes on those sort of tight corners twice a year, if he's any ordinary amount of bad luck. But it wasn't good enough for them. They weren't going to be drowned at any price. They might have been the Emperor of Russia for the value they put on their dirty hides; and they victualled the life-boats, and put them over the side, whether I liked it or not.

"I said, 'Wait till she sinks, and then we'll go.' They said, 'No, she'll pull us down with her too; and if you don't come now, you'll be left.' And so," said Morgan, in conclusion, "I went. I suppose I was a blame' fool; but it didn't strike me at the time I could do any use in a drifting steamer that was going to sink, without a crew to sink with me. And besides, somehow I wanted to see Polly and the kids again, though I quite understood I should only go back to them as a thoroughly broken man."

"It's all understandable enough here," said Evans thoughtfully.

"Yes, but it'll look different ashore. A daisy of a yarn I shall have to trot out when it comes to the Board of Trade enquiry. It doesn't matter whether they take away my ticket or not. I may as well bear up for the workhouse after this, for the devil another berth shall I get from any shipowner, unless, Captain," he added, rather pitifully, "you are man

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enough to pull me out of the mess. And you'll have your work cut out. That mate of yours in my ship didn't fancy picking us up at all."

But Captain Evans did not explain further. He said only that he would try his best, and went out on deck.

The *Zion Chapel* was not a swift craft: at her best she could do nine knots. The *Cykros* had done something wonderful for a cargo boat over her measured mile, but in ordinary life she steamed a bare eleven; and just now, in her undermanned state, she was reeling off a trifling eight. So Captain Evans easily steamed up alongside, and when the bridges of the steamers were level, and their flanks were only separated by some twenty fathoms of tolerably smooth water—smooth, that is, for the winter Western Ocean—he hailed:

"Howdy, Captain Hall?"

"Howdy, Captain?"

"I want you to heave to, Captain, and then come aboard of me. I'll send a boat; and you can bring Mr. McFee."

"I don't like to leave the ship, sir, unless it's something very important. I suppose those were the *Cykros's* lifeboats you picked up?"

"They were. I've got Captain Morgan and all his lot on board here, quite sound. We want to have a bit of palaver over their coming back again."

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“Oh, they needn’t bother to come,” said the ex-mate. “We can get along quite nicely, now we’ve tumbled into the way, and they’ll be all knocked up after their boat cruise. Likely enough, in their weak state they’d lose the ship after all, if they had her again.”

“They’re all right,” said Evans, “and they’re going to carry her home. You can take that from me.”

“Yes, but where do I come in?” the mate asked noisily. “This is about the only chance I shall ever have, and you’re going to make me miss it.”

“My son,” said Evans, “sailoring’s made up of bits of hard luck, and you’ve got to take your whack like other men. But you’ll be treated as well as can be managed.”

“I don’t see it,” said Hall. “I guess I’d better take the chances, and carry this ship home as she is, whether you like it or whether you don’t.”

“By glory!” said Evans, with a sudden flame of rage, “if you don’t do as I bid you I’ll lay the *Zion* alongside of that steamboat in another minute, and take you home in irons, if I smash half the plates in their sides whilst I’m getting you.”

“Oh, very well, if you’re set on it,” said Hall sullenly, and rang off his engines, and put his helm hard a-port. “Sheer away, you, out of my light and send your infernal boat.”

Some half-hour later the mate stepped on board

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the *Zion Chapel* wrapped in black temper, with Mr. McFee at his heels, grimly suspicious. The pair of them were conducted into the chart-house, and were offered whiskey, but refused to drink. The stiffness between the parties was too unaffected to be ignored, and Captain Evans wasted no time in beating about the bush.

"I'm going," he said, "to put Captain Morgan and his crew back on the *Cykros*. The crew are dogs, and I'd as lief as not see the lot of them starving on a roadside fence. But the captain here has been badly treated, and he is——"

"Your bloomin' son-in-law," said the mate.

"My excellent son-in-law," said Evans quietly. "This is precisely the way in which he left the *Cykros*," he added, and gave the tale with quietness and skill, exaggerating nothing, but showing off the crew's defection with pungent clearness. "And now," he continued, "it remains to be seen whether you deliberately want to ruin Captain Morgan or not. If that's your wish, you may do it and be hanged to you; though I don't see that you'll be any the better off for the job, except that you'll make a tidy fist-full of very stout enemies. If on the other hand you'll kiss the Book to hold your tongue on the matter, there'll be fifty pounds apiece for you for your pains. How's that?"

"There's the rest of the crew," said the mate.

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The captain was hot with speech. "As for the *Cykros* swine," said he, "you bet there's nothing they'll want to boast about. They will be only too pleased at a chance to keep quiet. And as for ours, you leave them to me. I guess they're just the sort to forget all this yarn for five-and-twenty pounds, and would like the chance to come again next week. It's only you two that are likely to be unreasonable. But what do you say, Hall?"

"I'm cornered. There's no way out of it. I won't kiss any Bibles, but I'll give you my word of honor and be d——d to you."

"Then I'll give you my check for the fifty."

"You can stick the money down your throat," replied the mate truculently. "Fifty pounds doesn't pay me for the chance I'm missing. I thought I was getting a good Christmas box out of this. Well, Captain Morgan, I give you back your Christmas box, and I don't want your thanks either."

Evans wiped his face. "Well, McFee," said he, "I'd like to hear your views upon the offer."

"Aweel," said the chief, "among Scots there's but little attention given to Yuletide festeevities and gifts. Therefore, Mr. Morgan, I'll go for returning ye the fufty poond."

"Right," said Evans. "I'll make your check at once. You won't lose your 'siller' after all, you see, McFee."

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“Bide a wee,” said the chief. “But I was going on to say that we’re a varra releegious people across the border, and that the New Year’s day is a great time with us. I’m thinking it’s a New Year the noo, and to celebrate the day, I’d like to make ye a present o’ yon fifty to spend on Mistress Polly and the bairns. Ye must ken I’m a married man mysel,” McFee added quietly.

“Gentlemen,” began Morgan, with a quaver in his voice, when Hall cut him short.

“Oh, for God’s sake,” the mate cried, “don’t get the pathetic stop out, or I shall blow up. Here, man, get across to your ship and good luck go with you. You aren’t half a bad sort, and I’m a beast. Skipper, if you’ll hand over a tenner in small change and let me and the chief speak to the crew we’ll see that none of the fellows split when they get ashore.”

Which was done; and that is why the news of that curious interchange in the Western Ocean never leaked out in the seaports. But by what methods the crew of the *Zion Chapel* were pinned to silence, the present writer refuses to tell.

The only persons who really suffered by the transaction were—it seems to me—certain shareholders of the *Zion Chapel*. Captain Evans, it may be remembered, only held two-sixty-fourths of the shares, so that there were other gentlemen who, had they

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known it, should have come into a very large fortune by way of salvage. On the other hand, certain parties connected with the *Cykros* were saved an equal sum. But all the same the accounts do not balance. In fact, the only thing (besides several reputations) really saved by Captain Evan's action, was a large amount in the inevitable law expenses of a salvage case.



# **The Personally Conducted Duel.**



# The Personally Conducted Duel.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE five gentlemen in black were arranging the preliminaries of an orderly *fin de siècle duel*. Captain Kettle came upon them quite unexpectedly.

Captain Owen Kettle had left the little French seaport far behind him. The noise of the mixed nationalities' working cargo on the *Sultan of Borneo*, and the rattle of her winches, had faded from his ears. And he was giving his brain an afternoon's holiday from all thoughts of crew-driving, percentages for pace, owners' secret instructions, and in fact from every matter in the least connected with nautical commerce. He had turned his heels on wharves and cranes and broker's offices, and was walking over the sand dunes for the purpose of communing with Nature. Such lapses from the routine of his life were rare to him, and sweet ac-

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cordingly. A man who has only three hours in the country per annum can skim the cream of its beauties without gathering so much as a hint that discomforts lurk beneath. The land birds, the whispering tufts of the grass, the yellow curves of the dunes all appealed to him. In his eyes they were new, and full of a strange beauty; and they awoke in him the mood poetical. His brain simmered with the commencement of sonnets. His lips were puckered into a noiseless whistle, as his thoughts set themselves to music. Even the sight of the duellists and their escorts did not bring him to earth all at once.

They had met in a shallow valley of the sand, these five men, where they were ringed in by the grass-tufted mounds. A hundred yards away Kettle was ignorant of their very existence. He walked up the slope of a dune, and saw them beneath him, as black marks against a sunlit background.

If they had held their tongues, even then he would have passed on his way only dimly conscious of the *rencontre*. But they took a very sure way of bringing him back to earth from his poetical soarings. They bade him with shouts and screams to go, to run away, to vanish. And when he gazed back on them, unanswering, they were foolish enough to add threats.

A change came over the little red-bearded man on the sky-line above them. He blinked his eyes a time or two, and seemed to grow more compact. He put

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a cigar between his teeth, bit off the end, and lit it.

The men in black repeated their threats, raised weapons, and cried out that they were five to one. Captain Kettle put one hand behind his loins, puffed cheerfully at the cigar, and walked down the slope of the dune towards them. He kept his eyes on the group as he walked, and at a dozen paces whipped out a long-barrelled revolver with the dexterity of an expert. Then he dropped it lightly into his right-hand jacket pocket. "And now," said he in fluent and ungrammatical French, "let's have no more of this foolish talk. If it comes to shooting I can snip the buttons off any of your coats without cutting the cloth."

"But, monsieur, you are intruding."

"I hear you say it," retorted Kettle. "Does any one of you gentlemen possess a park?"

There was a pause, and then a short stout man, who exhaled a faint odor of frangipanni, said, "None of us here is so fortunate. But my uncle does, monsieur, if that will help you?"

"Quite so. And may I ask, sir, if this place where we are standing now is your uncle's park?"

"Certainly not. It is, so far as I know, common land."

"Then there you are," said Captain Kettle, and he sat down on a tuft of grass. "I am not trespassing, and as it suits me to look on at your show, here I

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stay till it is over. I never had a chance before of seeing how a regular kid-glove law-and-order duel was fixed up. So wade in, gentlemen, as soon as you like; don't you let me hinder you any longer."

The five men in black seemed to be of different opinions. They were collected in three little groups.

"As a medical man, monsieur, and a non-combatant—" began the one in the tall hat, who stood by himself.

"This intrusion, monsieur, upon our rights—" said the fat black-muzzled man whose uncle had a park.

"You are a stranger unversed in the customs of France, monsieur," began the tall tired-looking man in the spectacles and the baggy clothes.

"A stranger?" said Kettle, jumping up and taking off his hat, "oh, if that's what the trouble's about, we'll be through with it in two shakes. My name is Owen Kettle, and I'm master of the steamship *Sultan of Borneo*, now loading in your port yonder. Very glad to see any of you gentlemen on board, if you'll come and have a glass of whiskey with me after this little affair is over."

The five men in black bowed at different angles, and the two pairs consulted together anxiously. Finally the man with the tall hat, who stood alone, laughed in rather a strained sort of way, and took upon himself to speak.

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“Time is moving,” he said. “I fancy you gentlemen had better get to work if you do not wish to be interrupted. Monsieur,” he added to Kettle, “you have stumbled upon the most celebrated duel of the year. You will have seen it spoken of every day during this last week in the papers.”

“Unfortunately I never read them,” said Captain Kettle. “Let’s see, sir, your name is, er, you said—?”

“I,” said the man in the tall hat drily, “am merely on the ground as surgeon, so humble an individual, that my poor name is not worthy of remembrance. But in the two principals here I have the honor to present to you Monsieur Camille Legrand, member of the Chamber of Deputies,” (here the stout man bowed), “with his second, who is likewise a politician; and also to Monsieur Crève, editor of the *Mot de Paris*.”

The tired-looking journalist with the spectacles nodded, and Kettle said he was very pleased to make his acquaintance.

“A man who has printed in his filthy paper most unwarrantable insults about me,” observed M. Legrand bitterly.

“I have nothing to retract,” said the journalist. “Truth is frequently unpalatable to scoundrels.”

“Presently, Monsieur Englishman, you will see this hireling liar screaming for pardon.”

The lean journalist began to say something about

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“a sacred pig who lived on what he thieved from widows and rag-pickers,” but the two seconds intervened, and insisted that their principals should desist. It was most unseemly that they should blurt out their differences upon the ground. It was against all the laws of the duel’s etiquette.

Captain Kettle was rather sorry. He loved to hear a good quarrel and to watch the ensuing fight. But he did not interfere. There was something about this disagreement which he did not understand. Words had been spoken, and still the weapons had not been levelled. Instead, two disinterested assistants busied themselves with a measuring tape. And in the background, the sardonic doctor, with an instrument case bulging his pocket, picked at the petals of a pink sea daisy with a botanist’s interest.

The seconds measured the ground quite twenty times before they found a range to suit them, and M. Crève meanwhile (through force of habit) made notes of current events upon a paper block. But at last two positions were found equally advantageous as regards sunlight and background, and two pegs were driven into the sand to mark them.

“Twenty-three yards!” exclaimed Captain Kettle in admiration. “By James, you gentlemen must be lovely shots or you wouldn’t risk missing one another over such a distance as that. Or perhaps it is rifles you are going to fight with!” he added tentatively.

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M. Legrand breathed hard as though he were going to say something, but changed his mind and only sent over a faint puff of frangipanni by way of reply. And after a pause, as no one else seemed inclined to speak, the doctor took upon himself to reply:

“Monsieur,” he said gravely, “we employ pistols for our duels here, so cleverly fabricated, that with due care they always give the result we wish for.” He lifted his tall hat courteously as he spoke, and Captain Kettle returned the salute. The little Englishman did not quite understand what had been said to him, but concluded that the fault lay with his own imperfect knowledge of the language. He could not help noticing, however, that the two duellists and their seconds did not appear to like the doctor’s explanation. Indeed the journalist started as though he had been pricked by a pin. But the ground was marked out; it was time for the seconds to place their men; and the side issue was swamped by the main interest of the meeting. The principals took their stand beside the little pegs, the doctor set off at a brisk walk at right angles to the proposed line of fire, and the seconds set about extracting weapons and ammunition from a mahogany box.

But at that moment Captain Kettle’s attention was drawn elsewhere. A hail came from behind him, a formal command to surrender. He turned and looked

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up, and on the rim of the dunes above saw a couple of beautifully spick and span gendarmes, with authority on their faces and swords at their hips.

The retreating doctor halted and lit a cigarette; the four men in the valley of the sand stood as if they were frozen; and the representatives of the law advanced with wooden looks and without hurry. They were perfect creatures of routine.

But of a sudden a change came over the group, quick as a scene in a harlequinade; a dust of sand rose in a cloud which slightly obscured the view; and when the air was clear again there was one of the beautiful gendarmes face-downwards on the ground with Captain Kettle astride of his shoulders, whilst the other stood dazed, like a man waking out of a bad dream, with his eyes converging upon the muzzle of Captain Kettler's revolver.

"Now," said Kettle to the duellists, but without turning his head, "wade in, gentlemen, and get your shooting over. I'll see you are not interfered with."

There was no reply.

"By James," said Captain Kettle, "you'd better put a bit of hurry into it, or some of these beauties' friends will be coming to look for them, and I can't guarantee to keep the whole of France off the premises."

"We are interrupted!" said the politician. "We have been betrayed! It is a device of this loathly newspaper man to escape my vengeance."

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“Well, start in right now, you goat, and murder him,” said Captain Kettle.

“You have baulked me now,” said Crève bitterly; “you have squirmed away from punishment with your usual trickery; but do not think you shall escape scot-free. I shall seek you again when this has blown over, and I shall leave my mark upon you.”

“Then why in mischief’s name don’t you do it now?” asked Kettle sourly. “You tall man in the spectacles, I’m speaking to you. What’s stopping you? Why doesn’t this fight go on? By James, answer me, or you’ll have a new quarrel on hand to keep you warm.”

“This duel is stopped, sir,” said the journalist, “because even for the sake of punishing this reptile I cannot consent to undergo a dozen years’ imprisonment. And that is what it would entail; I am a known man, sir.”

“He flatters himself,” sneered M. Legrand. “Not ten people who see daylight have even heard of him outside his little garret office.”

“And yet,” retorted the journalist, “the animal who has just spoken complained that I have made France ring with his name. If you know anything at all about the circulation of the various Paris newspapers, sir, —”

“I don’t,” said Kettle, “and I don’t want to. I

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dropped in here this afternoon to see shooting, and I've heard nothing but talk. And if you want my opinion of the pair of you, it's here, packed small: one of you's frightened, and t'other dar'nt."

"Sir!" shouted both of the duellists, for once in their lives agreed.

"Oh, that wakens you, does it?" said Kettle. "Well, then, see here. I'm in a way grown to be interested in this scuffle, and I'll make you this offer: give the whole thing over into my hands, and I'll see it through so that it shall be an affair a man can be proud of afterwards; or refuse, and go away with your tails between your legs, and I'll bill-post half France to tell everyone that can read you're a pair of sheep-livered cowards. Come now; there you have it."

M. Legrand listened unmoved, but the tall man in the spectacles flushed. "Sir," he said, "you'd better have a care for your words."

"Sir," retorted Kettle, "I allow my vocabulary to be overhauled by no man living."

"Then, sir," said the journalist, "you will force me to call you to account for your language."

"I shall be entirely at your disposal," said Kettle grimly, "after I have seen you stand up to this gentleman here who carries the scent. But not before. I have an objection to fighting with anyone who might turn out to be a woman in disguise."

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“That, sir,” said the journalist, “is quite sufficient. You Islanders are eccentric, but you will find out that eccentricity may sometimes cost you dear. I accept your condition of arranging my duel with M. Legrand merely for the sake of being able to shoot you afterwards.”

“Monsieur,” said Captain Kettle, “you are a man that I am beginning to like. And now, M. Legrand, you have heard what has been said. Are you willing to chip into this tea party, or are you going to shuffle back to your eating and drinking at Paris, and let me kick you before you go?”

Mr. Legrand shook his cheeks. “You English pig,” he cried, “I will come. You shall watch me kill the liar, Crève, and then you shall suffer whilst I kill you also, slowly and frightfully.”

“Good,” said Kettle, looking at his watch. “This is getting more like business, and the sooner we are clear of this beach the less likely we are to find hitches. I’ve ordered steam for five o’clock, and it’s four-thirty now. So we can march from here straight on board of my steamboat and be clear of pier heads in less than an hour’s time. But in the meanwhile these gendarmes must be bottled so that they can’t interfere. Doctor, I’ll trouble you for all your bandages.”

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### CHAPTER II.

THE *S S. Sultan of Borneo* was running merrily eastward in the roll of a short steep Channel sea. She was flying light and the propeller was racing half its time, and on the upper bridge the elderly second mate's oil-skins were kept perpetually new varnished with the spindrift. In the little chart-house Captain Kettle, with all his hospitable instincts roused, was endeavoring to entertain a couple of temporary guests.

The guests were just then not at their best. A Jove would cease to be majestic if he were suffering from *mal de mer*. But Kettle was taking this into account; he was kindness itself in trying to counteract the effect of the wobble of sea; and he had a theory that if one keeps the mind of a sufferer thoroughly interested, the more material part of him ceases to feel its ills. And as a consequence he tried to adapt himself to the particular style of each of his guests.

To M. Camille Legrand he spoke upon French politics as he himself had observed them through the

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light of harbor-side conversations. He did not profess to have a thorough grasp of his subject, and he talked more as a seeker after knowledge than as its possessor. But on the topic of corruption in politics he was strong; he gave his views with clearness and detail; and he wound up a most eloquent diatribe by telling the bulky deputy that a splendid opening lay before him:

“You get up in your Parliament in Paris, sir,” said Captain Kettle, “and say this swindling by public men has got to stop; and then you mention their names out loud and call them dirty thieves, and believe me, you’re a made man. All the rest of France will look up to you.”

But the suggestion did not cheer M. Legrand as much as Kettle had hoped; and perhaps the fact that he had been mercilessly exposed in the *Mot de Paris* that very week for being himself the chief actor in this identical offense, had something to do in his continued depression. So the little sailor turned to Crève and approached the task of interesting him with a lighter heart. He was surer of his ground here, for were they not both (in a way) literary men, although it was true that his own poems were for the most part written in the alien tongue of English. But Captain Kettle had confidence in his powers, and to show the tunefulness of his verse, he got down the accordeon and sang by way of introduction

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a ballad which went to the tune of "Greenland's Icy Mountains," and a little "Ode to Spring," which he had set to a pleasing ditty translated from the music halls. He offered to go through the rest of his repertoire, but the journalist said he could see from the specimen that they were beautiful; and when the little shipmaster proposed writing a series of sonnets in French to be run through the pages of the *Mot de Paris* at a ridiculously low rate of pay, M. Crève accepted the offer with alacrity on the sole condition that the poet should there and then begin to write.

Captain Kettle murmured bashfully "Anything to oblige," and took up his pen at once. And he began to have a sincere regard for M. Crève from that moment, and to regret more and more that so discerning a man should suffer so acutely from the torments of *mal de mer*.

But enamoured though the master of *Sultan of Borneo* might be with the gentle occupation of building stanzas to a poppy, and sonnets to the eye-brow of some lady he had met, in the *Family Herald*, he was not forgetful of more weighty business which he had taken in hand. His steamboat was working up-Channel in sight of French coast, and a dozen times he went on deck and peered through the bridge telescope at patches of beach which lay beyond the frill of surf. But none were desolate

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enough for his purpose, and each time he returned to the chart-house and let his tobacco smoke wrestle with the frangipanni and the smell of paint. His manuscript grew with strides. Never before had he felt so brilliantly inspired. The difficulties of language were as nothing. The words came to him tripping, as he drummed out the metre with his fingers on the mahogany of the chart-table, and the tunes seemed to jingle of their own accord. It was his first chance of publication, and his heart swelled within him at the thought that his opportunity had come at last. He almost wished he had asked the *Mot de Paris* a few francs more for the right of publication. It was such good, such brilliant poetry. It was fit to make the fortune of any newspaper.

The ship's bell clanged out the half hours, and the watches changed, but the occupants of the chart-house did not sleep: the Frenchmen could not, and as for Kettle, the ecstacies of composition had whirled him to a region where sleep was a thing undreamed of. But when midnight had long passed, and eight bells pealed out dimly through the wind, the Mate put his head inside the chart-house door, with a rush of cold salt air, and made an announcement.

“Very well,” said his Captain, “Ring off engines, and get the port quarter-boat in the water, and a Jacob's ladder shipped. The Second Mate and two

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hands for the boat: you stay here in charge. We shall be about an hour gone."

"Ay, ay, sir," said the Mate, and closed the door, and shut off the supply of air. Kettle turned to the table and began to page and fold his manuscript. Something that was half groan, half voice, addressed him by name from behind.

"Captain!"

"Yes?"

"Are we—oh—going—ashore?"

"Ah, is that you, M. Crève? Glad to see you pulling around so nicely, sir. In thirty minutes you'll hear French shingle gritting under your feet, and in forty-five we'll have your little affair with M. Legrand fixed up one way or the other. After that I believe you want to make practice on me, and I shall be very much at your service, and believe me, sir, I shall feel much honored to stand up with a gentleman so intimately connected with literature as yourself."

The journalist groaned in acquiescence.

"But there's one thing I've been thinking of," Kettle went on, "that we ought to fix up before we go any further. You see, sir, you're going to stand in the way of a good deal of shot during the next hour, and you might—er—you might have a bit of an accident. Now I am sure that it would grieve you to think that these poems of mine should not

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be used through any misfortune of yours; and so I thought if you wrote a line to your assistant editor at the office, it would be safer. If you like, I'll just jot it down for you, and you can sign it."

"Oh, yes, anything," said Crève, and Kettle with a glow of joy wrote the note, handed a wet pen, and had it initialled with a feeble scrawl. Then he put it with the other papers, sealed and addressed the envelope, and gently slipped it into the inner breast pocket of the journalist's frock coat.

"In case of accidents," he murmured gently. "You'll pardon me, I'm sure. And now, gentlemen, if you please, here's my Mate come to tell us the boat is ready, and we'll be getting off ashore."

But prayerfully as the two Frenchmen had wished once more to press their mother earth, when the opportunity came for regaining her, they could not move. The fetters of their disease chained them in a deadly lethargy; a bombardment would not have roused them; and they were finally carried to the outer air in the callous arms of quartermasters. It was obviously impossible to expect them to enter the lunging quarter-boat by that fly's staircase, the Jacob's ladder; so a chair was bent to a derrick chain and steam given to the winch, and they were hoisted out and stowed away on the wet floor gratings of the boat just as though they had been (to quote the Mate's simile) two carcasses of New

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Zealand mutton. Then Kettle slipped nimbly down and took the tiller, the Second Mate and the two deck hands threw out their oars, and the quarter-boat crawled slowly off over the rearing Channel seas towards the low French shore.

The landing was made stern on, and through a wet surf. The boat was full to the thwarts when she hit the beach. And two passengers lay on the stern gratings with the swill of brine going over them as it pleased. But once the thrill of the earth came to them through the quarter-boat's timbers, a change set in; and from that moment they began to return to life and mischief. They roused of their own accord and began to recoil from one another. They rose to their feet. They left the boat at different sides.

"At last!" the journalist hissed from between his white lips.

"Now, poltroon, you shall not escape me," snarled the Deputy, as he pressed a wet, scentless handkerchief to his chilly nose.

"If only we had seconds——"

"If we but had seconds and a doctor, I would not permit you to leave this ground alive. This fight should be *à l'outrance*. I would insist on my right to fire on you so long as breath remained in my body."

"Go it!" said Captain Kettle cheerfully. "That's

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your sort. I'll have things all fixed up in a minute, and then you can wade in handsomely. This is a rare good pistol-box of yours: not a drop of wet has got inside."

"You waste time, Captain," said Legrand. "We cannot fight here now. We have no seconds. It would be irregular."

"Not a bit of it," said Kettle. "I will be second to both of you."

"It is not permitted by our laws of duelling," said Crève. "Each principal must have at least one friend to watch his interests."

"Right-O," said Captain Kettle. "Here's my second Mate quite handy, and a most worthy man, gentlemen. He holds a master's ticket, and has commanded his own ship before he met with misfortune. He'll hold the handkerchief for one of you, whilst I give a knee to the other."

M. Legrand frowned and shook his bullet-head. "But, Captain," he said, "you forget, we have no doctor."

"I," said Kettle, "am a competent doctor for temporary bandaging; and," he added sourly, "I could offer my services as undertaker if I thought they would be needed."

"Sir," said Legrand, "your remark is suited to my adversary, but to me it is an insult."

"Then please log it down as such, and remember

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it when you and I stand up together after this affair is over. Please, sir, to plant yourself here and take this pistol. By James! do you hear me? I'm bossing this fight now, and it's got to be carried through as I say. The man who doesn't do as he's bid will be shot in very quick time. It's all South Shields to a tin-tack I lose my berth on that steamer for putting in here at all. So I'm not inclined to stick at trifles. Now, Mr. Mate, you bring up your man, and give him his gun, and put him by that green stone yonder."

The Deputy's voice rose to a scream. "But this is most irregular. He's no more than ten yards away. This is murder!"

"You came here for murder, didn't you?" said Kettle. "I'm not going to look on whilst you pop off these humbugging little toys down a rifle range. Here's your weapon, loaded, and cocked; and mind not to fire till you hear the word.—Now, Matey, stand wide.—And listen here, you other two: you've to blaze away when I sing 'Three'; and not before, and not after; and the one who breaks that rule will get a shot in him that will mean a funeral."

Captain Kettle stepped back, and ostentatiously pulled a revolver from his pocket, and cocked it. "Now," he said, "ready? One!—Two!—Three!"

The shots came almost together, and each of the duellists staggered, and each evidently marvelled to

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find himself alive. The journalist pulled himself together the first. "I'm not hurt," he said. "Load my pistol again."

Captain Kettle stepped forward with a courteous smile. "Certainly," he said. "Gentlemen, I am glad to see you are warming up to your work. Matey, just have the kindness to load up for M. Legrand.—There you are. No, cock it, sir; cock it before you shoot. And wait for the word.—One!—Two!—Three!"

Again there was a miss on both sides, and the Second Mate whistled with cheerful contempt. But at the third discharge a patch of red showed on the thumb of M. Crève's left hand, and the Deputy was quick to see it. "Ah!" he cried, "I have wounded him. My honor is satisfied."

"Then your honor must be a mighty small thing," grunted Captain Kettle.

"You do not understand," said M. Legrand. "I am tender of heart. I do not wish to see him suffer more. I will embrace him, and all shall be forgiven."

"No," said Crève. "It is merely a nail scratch. I demand another shot."

"Bravo, spectacles!" shouted Captain Kettle. "I always did think there was good in you. Here, you fat man, get back to your mark. By James, sir, get back or I'll kick you to it. And take this gun—

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Don't splutter. If you have any remarks to address to me, reserve them for afterwards. I can tell you you're not through with this first affair yet."

A fourth cartridge was wasted on each side. A fifth and a sixth, but in the seventh round the journalist hit M. Camille Legrand in the right shoulder, and that worthy fell to the ground, howling that death was upon him. Kettle went up and made a quick examination. "Yes," he said, "bullet in at one side and out at the other. No bones touched, and scarcely any hemorrhage. You'll be sound again in a fortnight, and you can go on with the game now, if you like."

"No," said M. Legrand, "I am wounded to the death. The pain I suffer is frightful. But I die in defense of my principles! Let that be known by the papers: in defense of my principles!" Then he fainted, and "Sheer funk," was Captain Kettle's summing up of the situation.

"He is not a fighting man," said the journalist. "He was pressed into this affair by the custom of our country."

"Then more fool he," said Kettle. "But he should go about with less splutter on his tongue, or someone will be kicking him one of these days. And now, sir, as I believe you want to parade me, I must ask you to get along. My time is short."

The tall man in the baggy clothes placed a hand

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over his heart and bowed. "Sir," he said, "I used hasty words to you when I was a stranger to your qualities. Since then I have learned that you are not only a gentleman, but also—er—also a man of letters. It would go against my heart to fight you now, but if you insist—"

"Not at all," said Kettle. "I should be very sorry to make cold meat of a gentleman who said such pleasant things about my poetry. Er—you know, some of these verses may want a bit of the spelling altered and a stop or two put in, but you keep a man in the office to do that, don't you?"

"Several men," said the journalist.

"And you'll send the check to care of my owners? Thanks. Ah, there's M. Legrand coming round. I wonder if he wants to have his shot at me before I go. I'm quite willing we should both hold our guns with the left hand."

But M. Camille Legrand cherished no more war-like feelings. He was full of forgiveness; he bubbled with it; and he wept in most affecting style on the journalist's neck and made a lengthy speech, which he insisted that M. Crève should take down verbatim on his paper block. At this point, however, Captain Kettle went away, and was rowed out by the Second Mate and the two deck hands to where the *Sultan of Borneo* wallowed wetly in the troughs of the Channel seas. But he steered the quarter-boat

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like a man in a dream. He had seen many fights, but none like this; he had watched many men in anger, but none like these; and if anyone had asked him before if things could fall out as he had seen them then, he would have replied emphatically "No!" It was all queer to him, past understanding. But he smiled with pleasure and blushed at one memory which clung to him. He had found a road now by which his poems, his scoffed-at poems, could be given to the world.

# **The Blind Skipper.**

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# The Blind Skipper.

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## CHAPTER I.

“THEN put into English, doctor, this means that I must go stone-blind?”

“God help you, Captain, yes.”

“Would it be any use, sir, my going to see another doctor about the thing? Don’t call me rude for asking, but this means something pretty tough for me. You see, sir, there’s my girl to think about, as well as myself.”

“I don’t consider you rude in the least, Captain Maitland, and I’d advise you to call in second opinion at once if it wasn’t for the expense. But you asked to hear the worst, and I thought it kindest to tell you the bare truth. There is nothing that surgery can do to relieve you. Your case amounts to this——” continued the doctor, and gave all the technical details of his diagnosis.

The sailor blinked at him with a drawn face, but

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understood nothing till the final sentence was delivered: "And that, my poor chap, amounts to decay of the optic nerve." He had never heard of an optic nerve before, either, but intuition defined it to him then, and he shivered as the knowledge came.

"If you think over your symptoms," said the doctor, "you must confess that you have had warning that this was coming on."

"That is so," said Maitland, "now I look back on them. Once I had the eyesight of a bird. But that is long ago now. It has fouled itself by degrees. First the colors began to mix themselves; and it is ten years now since I have been sure that a red light wasn't green, or the other way on. Then when the dark came away after sundown, lights used to bobble about all over the sea, so that I couldn't tell which were steamers and which were jumps. It wasn't whiskey, sir, that lit 'em up. I've been stark, staring sober at sea since the trouble's been on me, and if I have been sprung once or twice after I come into port, why, I think it's to be understood. No man knows what my anxiety was when I had to be on the upper bridge when there was anything like a crowd of shipping round, outside a port."

The doctor whistled softly. "I wonder," he said, "how many passengers have been with you this last ten years. You carried me, for one, and I remember we came in between Tynemouth pierheads with

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a fog like a blanket all round, and the air just shaking with steamers' sirens. We were doing thirteen knots, and I tried to comfort myself with the idea that your eyesight was phenomenally good, but felt very frightened notwithstanding. I'm glad I didn't know at the time that you were three parts blind. I had heart trouble on me, then, and if I had been any more badly frightened, I should probably have died."

The sailor nodded. "Just so. It doesn't do for passengers to know these things. I tell you I felt bad enough myself about it, but that couldn't be helped. I only knew one trade to make a living at, and I was a poor man, with not even an insurance put by. So I've kept quiet up till now. I thought it would come out the other day at the Enquiry, after I'd brought the boat into collision, and I thought they'd probably pity me a good deal, but take away my ticket for always. But it didn't, and I wasn't even called upon to lie about the thing; I'm a fully-certificated shipmaster this minute, and qualified (so far as the Board of Trade is concerned) to skipper the next new flier that leaves the yards to cut the Western Ocean record."

"And so," said the doctor, "you're going back to command that passenger steamer? Why, man, it's wicked—it's murderous!"

The man shrugged his big shoulders. "I've lost

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the berth, as should go without saying. What company ever kept on a captain that had a bit of smudge on his luck?"

"Ah, I see," said the other with relief; "and I beg your pardon. If it isn't a rude question, what do you intend to do next?"

"The Lord may know, doctor, if He hasn't forgotten me entirely. I can't say for certain myself, but I expect it'll be a case of bearing up for the workhouse."

"Oh, come now; I hope it won't be so bad as that."

"If you'll tell me," rejoined the sailor, "what else I can do?"

The doctor considered a minute, and then spoke gravely: "I don't know, Maitland; but you *must* use your wits and your head above water. I know it's a delicate thing to talk to a man about his daughter's reputation, but if you don't know about your girl already, you ought to be told. She'll bear looking after very carefully. I'm not a man who tears people's characters to pieces. I see and hear a deal in the course of my practice, but I keep it mostly to myself. But I like you, and I should be sorry for your girl to go to the bad. I don't mean to say that she is bad, because she isn't. But her infernal good looks are at the bottom of it

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all; all the young fellows in the place are trotting after her."

"I know. But is there anyone in particular?"

"Yes, there is."

"If you'll tell me his name?"

"I don't see why not; the fact is common property. Keep your weather-eye lifting on young Gedge."

The sailor got up slowly and thrust out a large hand. "Thank you, doctor," he said; "and what do I owe you, please?"

"Oh, nothing, man, nothing. I'm very sorry for you, and I'd like to do you a good turn if I can. Here, get along with you into the passage, and mind the step; I've a roomful of other patients to see."

Captain Maitland went outside into the street, and walked towards his home. He bumped against a good many people on the way, and because his weight was heavy, some of them swore at him with fluency. But he neither swore nor apologized in return, which was unusual for him. He went on impassively, thinking very hard, and at last came to a narrow house in a long plain row, with bright green flower pots in the lower room window. He stumbled through the doorway into a slim passage, which smelt of paint.

"Hullo, old man, back again? Got a berth?"

His daughter came out of the little sitting-room, bent his face down to hers, and kissed him. She was

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a tall, strapping girl, with strong black hair, good color, and fine black eyes. She was well curved, and full of life altogether. They went into the parlor arm-in-arm. He sat on a sofa of mahogany and horsehair. He disregarded the questions, and peered at her anxiously from his half-blind eyes.

“Clarrie,” he said, “I wish I’d not minded what your mother said about being genteel, and brought you up to the dressmaking. And I wish, dearie, you weren’t so darned good-looking. D’ye think, now, Clarrie, you could do a turn at governessing if you were put to it?”

“Can’t spell, for one thing,” said Miss Maitland. “It’s no use, old man, your bringing up the question again. I won’t go into a shop, and you won’t let me be a barmaid, though that’s the only thing I’m fit for.”

Captain Maitland rasped his hand over a bristly arm of the sofa.

“No, Clarrie dear, I couldn’t bear to have you pulling beer at tuppence a glass for any kind of loafer that came in; but I’d like much to see you settled somehow. Ye see this house has been an expense, and I’ve been able to put nothing by. And the sea’s so risky. Something might happen to me any day.”

Miss Maitland kissed him again.

“Don’t get in the dumps, old man,” she said, “and

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don't worry about me. If you get drowned, I'll drown myself, too. You don't know how awfully fond I am of you."

"But I do worry, Clarrie. There's all sorts of messes a handsome girl like you might get into. Why, it's only this day I heard them talking about you and that young Gedge."

"What were they saying?"

"Oh, only talking. But you know best if there's anything in it."

"Well, there is, and there isn't."

"Does he want to marry you, Clarrie?"

Numbering color-blindness among his other optical ailments, Captain Maitland did not see the flaming red on his daughter's cheeks, and as she did not reply, he went on.

"He isn't a badly-off young chap, Clarrie. He's got two steamboats of his own, now, and a good many sixty-fourths in three others. He makes quite a little line of them, and when freights are up again, they'll be bringing him in a nice thing. But perhaps he's too loose for you, Clarrie. You may want a steadier man. Still, I'd like much to see you married. How old might you be now, dearie?"

"I tell people two-and-twenty. I've told them that these three years now."

"Twenty-five! Oh, Christmas! How time does

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slip along. And you twenty-five and had no chance of marriage yet?"

"I have had—heaps. There's ten men asked me at the very least. Nice enough lads, too; but they were all poor. And it's going to be no love-in-a-cottage for me, old man: not much. But it's not that I'm over-particular. I'd take," she added softly, rubbing her ear against his pilot-cloth sleeve, "I'd take almost anything in trousers if he'd got money. I've never seen a man yet I couldn't manage if I tried."

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It was some twenty days after this conversation that Captain Maitland was again in command of a steamer, with instructions to lose her somehow, somewhere between Tyne pierheads and the harbor of Palma, in Majorca. The steamer was of venerable age, and when the cargo roared into her from the coal-shoots, Captain Maitland hoped piously that the bottom would not fall out of her before he got to sea. Within the next two days he was beginning to hope that the bottom would not trouble to stay in her much longer.

Captain Maitland's previous ten years of command had been passed beside the shores of these Islands, between the South and a Tyne port; and at his prime he had possessed all the instincts of the coasting skipper, which are many more than those

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of the ordinary human being. He had carried a large scale-chart in his head; had imbibed knowledge from the lead and its covering of tallow; and had extracted more than an ordinary amount of information from the compass. In North Sea parlance "he had found his way along by smell" when the land was blotted out by fog or night.

But in this new command, unless he could contrive to end it before he cleared the Channel, he would be called upon to use (amongst other implements) a sextant in working his passage across the Bay, and even down coast before he made the Straits. The notion troubled him. He could see with much distinctness eight independent suns dancing before him in the heavens, and which was the real luminary hung up by the Almighty for the use of mariners was a thing he could not decide to a matter of quite 20 degrees. Also pricking off a course on a chart would have bothered him, because to his eyes all charts were one smooth blur of Quaker's grey, without the least speck of sounding or seamark whatever.

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### CHAPTER II.

FOUL, thick weather during our winter months in the North Sea and the English Channel is generally a blessing which comes without praying for; and if Captain Maitland had been given half a chance, he would have rammed the black coal boat on Flambro' or the Goodwins as cleverly as any insurance robber on the oceans. But not the vaguest atom of excuse was given him. The days were brilliantly fair: in the nights, the coast lamps burnt like the lights of Regent Street.

Captain Maitland cursed his luck, and the lean, grimy steamer rounded the South Foreland and wallowed down channel on a course for Ushant Light. The skipper's hopes brightened. A good collision would have served his purpose grandly. But although the Boundary Ditch bristled with shipping, he might have been carrying small-pox on board instead of coals, from the wide berth it all gave him. And when a full moon popped up aggressively into the sky just as he took his vessel into Alderney Race, with the intention of knocking that island out

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of the water, he could have wept at the way the Fates were treating him.

The steamer blundered about the Bay for the next two days, and Captain Maitland looked wise, but had remarkably little notion as to his whereabouts. But at the end of this time he got entirely desperate, and made up his mind to finish the business, whether he came out of it with a sound skin or a character gone beyond reprieve; and, consequently, he went about with muffled feet when night hid the iron lower decks, and executed certain arrangements; and, consequently his mate came into the chart-house with a very frightened face at four o'clock that morning, and said that the steamer was badly on fire in the afterhold.

Captain Maitland jumped to his feet, and played the profane and anxious skipper to the life. There was no doubt about the fire. Number three hatch was blown out already, and great greasy coils of smoke were pouring out from the gap, and floated across the pink dawn which lay on the eastern waters. With a perfect trust in the rottenness of all his hose and pumps, and other extinguishing gear, Captain Maitland gave prompt crisp orders to pour water and stream on the smouldering coals, and then he stood by with oaths on his teeth and joy in his heart, and watched the fire gain grip. He did not reflect that he was a most pernicious scoundrel for

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robbing insurance clubs and trifling with the lives of several men. He was thinking entirely of his daughter, who was the only person that cared about him in all the world; and also of a certain young and rising shipowner called Gedge whom he desired to see as that daughter's husband.

The coal-boat's head was put up into the wind, and the fire gained ground. The men who fought it were driven forward by the heat, with white blisters on their hands, and smoke-grime bitten deep into their faces. She was on fire up to the engine-room bulkhead. A newer steamer might have withstood that gutting; the old coal tramp could not. There was scarcely a scrap of wood about her, for she had iron decks, iron sheathing, iron houses, iron everything; but the plating was worn thin with age and use; and the fierce teeth of the flames bit round the loosened rivets. She was sinking by the stern, and the long swelling rollers of the Bay began to lap over her poop-rail. They had just time to get their boats in the water and shove away from her before she went down.

A deep hoot boomed through the crisp morning air. Another steamer, a great, white-painted passenger-liner was bearing down on them, her rails fringed with curious faces.

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Captain Maitland folded carefully the piece of

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paper which had been given him and put it in his pocket-book. He was in a small, dingy ship-owner's office in a Tyneside town, and on the other side of the untidy table was a keen-looking man of two and thirty who bore the name of Gedge.

“Ah!” said the sailor; “I’m glad you have given me a check.”

“What do you mean?” asked Gedge.

“I was afraid it might have been notes, or gold.”

“What the deuce are you driving at?”

“Just this,” returned Maitland, grimly, “I want you to marry my daughter.”

“Oh, do you? Then, once for all, I shall do nothing of the kind.”

“Perhaps you’ll tell me why?”

“Well, if you will have have it, Captain, the reason’s this: I intend to get on in life, and if I can’t raise myself by marriage, I shan’t marry at all. That’s flat.”

“My girl’s none to be ashamed of, Mr. George, I tell you. She can talk nice and dress well, and she’s the handsomest there is for many miles around here.”

“I quite grant that. I’ll admit, if you like, that I admire her extremely. But, to be blunt, Captain, she has neither money nor position, and so she’s going to be no wife for me. I tell you, I’m a man that means to get on.”

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“Then,” said Maitland, hitting the pocket-book savagely with his fist, “you hear me. I’m a man entirely reckless now. I only know one trade, and I’m blind, and I can never earn another penny at that. My girl’s been used to soft living, and I can’t give it her any longer. You can. You’ve been dangling after her, and by thunder! if you don’t make her your wife I’ll ruin you, and go to jail singing, so long as I’ve got you at my heels.”

“The man’s mad,” said the shipowner.

“I’m nothing of the kind—and you know it; only desperate. You’ll ask my girl this day, Mr. Gedge, and marry her before another month’s gone, or I’ll go to the police and blow on the whole little business there’s been between us. I’ve been a decent honest man all my life; and you don’t fancy I’ve turned insurance thief just for the sport of the thing and a little dirty money. No, *sir*; I did it because I saw no other way of pinning you down. I don’t care a tuppence for myself—only her. And if you force me, I’ll get out of this office right now, and get across to the station and give myself up, and have it over. I’ll tell the beaks I set the blamed old tramp on fire, and tell them that you know me for a blind man and hired me to lose her. If they’ve any doubt left, there’ll be the check to prove it. What sort of job were you likely to give me £200 for if it was to be done on the square?”

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“Pah! do you think I could not explain that away?”

“No, I don’t. And if you did it, so that the fool of a magistrate let you off, you can bet large that other people wouldn’t be gulled. I’d like to see what insurance club would touch one of your ships afterwards. No, sir, your ticket would be dished for good if I spoke, and you know it.”

“You old beast!” said Gedge, “do you dare to threaten me?”

“I’d dare just now to cut off Satan’s tail with a handsaw. There was never a man who valued himself less—or his daughter more.”

“You’d make a pretty father-in-law,” said the younger man gloomily.

“Don’t you frighten yourself with me,” returned the sailor. “The moment I see my girl clearly married, I go off—where, it doesn’t matter. But you’d never be pestered with me in the offing any more.”

“If only I could be sure of that.”

Maitland produced his pocket-book again, and took from it a large paper, with a wood-cut at the head, which he spread on the writing-table. It was the prospectus of a charitable institution for decayed shipmasters.

“There!” he said; “I never thought I should climb down to getting a berth there myself. I’ve subscribed to it when I was flush, a score of times,

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and I've sent them in subscriptions which the passengers in the boat have made a score of times more. And now the doctor's wrote to them about my case, and in this paper they give me the offer of a room in the institution till I'm due for the churchyard. You'll never see me, Mr. Gedge, and you needn't be at all ashamed of me if people do get to know where I am, and talk. It's a most genteel pauper shop. Look at the picture of the old bucks standing in a row, with their white beards and black clothes on. I can't see it now myself, but I remembered it well enough."

"And supposing I gave way to this bullying of yours and did marry the girl, aren't you afraid of my being pretty rough with her?"

Captain Maitland chuckled.

"I guess my Clarrie is quite woman enough to take care of herself. Why, man, if you lifted a finger against her, she could knock you into a compass-box. You wouldn't do it, though. You're a keen man of business, but you aren't the sort to be a brute with women. Besides, you'd like the girl hard enough once you were married to her. You couldn't help yourself."

Mr. Gedge winced like a man in pain.

"And now," said Maitland, rising up and fumbling with his hat, "I've said my say, and I'll take myself off. I'm a slow mover now, because I am not

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handy at warping myself along by a stick and a curb-stone, and the afternoon'll be through before I get down home. If you like to go down and have a chat with Clarrie first, I'd be pleased; and if you'll stay and take a cup of tea with us afterwards I'll be prouder still. So, sir, I wish you good morning for the present."

The shipowner tapped his teeth with the shaft of a pen till the fumbling of his visitor's stick and shoes died away down the passage, and still his thoughts did not stray back to freights and charter parties, and bills of lading.

"What a curious old ruffian it is!" he mused; "and how fond he is of that girl! I wonder if she put him up to this? I don't think it, but still I couldn't like her less if she has done. It's cute; yes, smart as anything I've seen. He's pinned me, and that's a fact; and I might do a dashed sight worse than marry Clarrie. She hasn't a penny to her name, confound her, and she moves in no sort of society. But she's respectable, and—dash it all!—well, I've always been fond of her. But it won't do to get cornered like this again. It's the first time I've worked off the straight, and it's going to be the last. I mightn't get off so easy next trip. And besides, freights are climbing up. It will be more profitable to run ships than to sink them."

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He broke off, laughed, and rang a bell. A clerk came in from the outer office.

“Oh, Greenhough, I’m going out.”

“Yes, sir. Anywhere I can say?”

“No.”

“Don’t know whether you recollect, sir, but you’ve two appointments for here this afternoon. Both important. There’s Mr.—”

“Oh, yes, I haven’t forgotten; but I can’t stop for them. ’Fact is, Greenhough, I’m going out to make arrangements about getting married. You needn’t publish that widely yet, you know, but you may tell one or two of your friends in confidence. And —er—oh, I say, isn’t there a brush somewhere in the office. My hat’s all dust.”

## The Tow.



## The Tow.

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THE night was very hot and very still, with a steep swell running up from the north-east after days of windless calm. The sea burnt in flames like summer lightning, and the hot black sky blinked and blazed like the phosphorescence. When the steamer slid her nose down into a valley, the screw raced noisily, and the poop-deck showed bright against a Catherine wheel of fire.

In the chart-house the captain lay on the outside of his bed in shirt and cap and cotton trousers. His rubber-thigh boots and a leather-bound oil-skin lay handy in a heap on the floor. He was sleeping most industriously, anticipating what was to follow.

On the upper bridge the second mate and a Norwegian quartermaster pinned the *Paraguay* steadily to her course. They were briskly alert, both of them, and every half-bell the officer stamped down the leaded steps of the ladder and glowered at the

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aneroid in the head of the companion-way. Each time, as he came back, the second mate swore to himself softly and pungently.

On the forecastle head the remaining member of the steamer's visible complement glided silently to and fro, swinging his eyes mechanically through one unvarying quadrant of the night, and lifting up his voice each half hour for the melancholy minor chant of "All's well" after the bell had clanged out its notion of the time. There were noises like the squeaking of new shoes which might have made one think that other people were about on the prowl. But these came from the *Paraguay* herself. She was old, and the scend of the seas ran high, and the wrenching made her rivets ache and cry out querulously.

Seven bells had just gone—half-past eleven—and the second mate was thinking that in another thirty-five minutes he would be snoring in his bunk, cyclone or no cyclone. His spell of responsibility was drawing to an end, and he was feeling a freer man. He was doing his usual pendulum walk along the bridge, an up-hill and down-dale walk, as the steamer lolled over the swells, when of a sudden he brought up short opposite the binnacle, and swung smartly round on his heels. Like most sailors, he had that indefinable faculty of seeing out of the back of his head, and it seemed to him then, that

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a light had sprung up from the sea far away in the black distance. The yellow glow from the binnacle dazzled him. He walked to the bridge end and thrust his chin over the canvas dodger, and peered into the night from there. The lightning nickered above, the little flames of the phosphorescence burned beneath, but there was nothing else.

Presently he turned and hailed: "Fo'c'sle there! Did you see anything broad abeam to loo'rd about a minute since?"

The reply came in a sleepy monotone: "No; seen nothing, sir."

"H'm," grumbled the second mate to himself; "must have been a star shooting." But still he kept on staring over the top of the dodger, and presently he whistled aloud and said: "By God! what's that now?"

The lightning was out for the moment, and the abyss of darkness before him was being split by a curving thread of yellow flame, which slid slowly up and came to a brilliant head, and then broke into a constellation of tiny stars.

The second mate's action was prompt. He clapped a whistle between his teeth and blew till a deck hand came tumbling up out of the corner where he had been dozing; gave his orders; and in thirty seconds saw them executed.

With a *fizz* and a *woosh* and a roar, the *Para-*

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*guay's* answering rocket spurted up into the heavens.

As though it had been expected, another rocket slid skyward in the distance, and then another, and then others. And to take away the last atom of doubt as to what was the matter, news was given to the second mate of another sort. The *Paraguay* was brigantine rigged, and giving the deck-hand a night-glass, the officer of the watch had sent him to the fore top-gallant yard to see if he could make out anything from there.

The hail came down promptly. "Three red lights, one above the other, broad on the starboard beam." And then—"Ah, the lightning's showing her now. A fine big screw boat, sir, about five miles off, rolling in the trough with no way on. She's painted black, and I'd call her 6,000 tons. Seems to me like one of the Spanish Main Line boats."

The second mate had got his bearings already. "Eight points starboard," he said, and whilst the quartermaster was repeating the order and sawing over the spokes of the steam-wheel, he was running down the ladder as fast as the rails could slip through his hands.

The captain's eyes opened with a snap as the second mate swung into the deck-house.

"Wind come away already?" he asked, sitting up and putting his arms into a jacket.

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“Not yet, sir, though it may be down on us any minute. But there’s a big steamer disabled and showing rockets and distress lights about five miles off to the norrad.”

“Well?”

“I headed for her, and then came down and told you. She’ll be wanting a pluck in somewhere, I’m thinking.”

“Oh, my Lord,” said the captain, “has the chance come for me at last, after twenty years of waiting? Am I going to get a good fat tow, and bilk the workhouse after all? Don’t tell me she’s some cheap old tramp, Llewellen.”

“I sent a man aloft, sir, and he said he thought she was one of the Spanish Main boats.”

The captain ran on to the upper bridge. “Spanish Main boat,” he repeated. “Let’s see; what’s the date? Ah! Their *Tampico* would be due about here just now. She’d have specie on board, and eighty passengers, I guess, besides mails and cargo. If she’s lying here disabled with this weather coming on, it would mean a thousand pounds out of the salvage for me if I pulled her in safe somewhere, and a purse of at least five hundred from the passengers after the scare this gale will rub into them. Oh, Lord! To think of it. But no such slice of luck for me. I’ll not believe it. I was born on a Friday.”

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The *Paraguay* closed with the disabled steamer, and the captain danced on the plank of the upper bridge. "Oh, Llewellen," he cried, "here's fortune! It is that fat old *Tampico* herself, and no other. Vaughn's her skipper now, the same chap that gave evidence against me and dirtied my ticket about that running down business. I guess he's got to scream now. We'll bleed that steamboat till her owners wish she'd never been built. Slip down to the chief, will you, and say I want him to take the engine-room himself for the next—Heaven knows how long; and whilst you're passing, rout out the Mate, and tell him to rouse that new ten-inch coir rope of ours out of the store and get it passed aft. Ohé, the *Tampico* there!"

The hail came back from a shadowy form on the other steamer's bridge: "Glad to see you, Captain. What's your steamer?"

"The *Paraguay*—tramping. Do you want any help? You seem to have a lot of passengers aboard there."

"I've broken my shaft. For how much will you give me tow into Port Royal, Jamaica?"

"Is that Captain Vaughan that's speaking?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Captain Owen Morgan, and I fancy it's no use us two haggling here. If we did hit on a price it could be upset afterwards. You pass me

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your rope, Captain, and we'll let the courts settle up the bill between us when the time comes. Better put some hurry in it; the wind may come away any minute now."

"Very well," said the master of the *Tampico*, and gave his orders.

On the instant three port-fires blazed out, pouring molten drops on to the black water beneath, turning the faces of the men who held them, and of the frightened passengers who clustered at the rail, white and ghastly beyond belief. Captain Morgan looked on and chuckled. He was going to risk his life and his ship, and those passengers would pay him liberally for doing it. The worse their scare, the more generous would be their offerings, and the master of the *Paraguay* prayed that the gale which was to come might be the worst they could possibly live through. He was a poor man, this Captain Owen Morgan, with debts and a family dragging on him, and such a chance had never come to him before, and might reasonably be expected never to come again. To all merchant skippers the height of fortune is a good fat tow and plenty of coal, but most of them die before it arrives. And here was £200,000 rolling helpless in the trough, and ready to yield up its lawful eighth for salvage. Captain Morgan could have hugged himself with delight.

The *Tampico*'s port life-boat hung outboard in

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davits ready manned by a crew in uncouth cork jackets. As the blue fires blazed out, the tackles screamed through the blocks. She hit the water with a great kissing splash, unhooked on the instant, and was spurred away as the steamer's back side heaved up thirty feet on the swell. The oars straddled out like the legs of some crawling insect, beating the water one after the other; but by degrees they fell into time, and the boat wormed its way over the rolling seas. She carried a two-inch rope made fast to the ring-bolt in her stern, and on the *Tampico*'s forecastle-head a couple of deck-hands paid out the rope from a coil as the boat dragged it towards the other steamer.

The rope was passed on board the *Paraguay* and brought to the after-winches, and the life-boat hurried back as fast as a frightened crew could scurry her. A ridge of fire had grown across the distant sea, and it was driving down on the steamers with the pace of a bullet. The *Paraguay*'s winch bucked till the deck swung beneath it, and the great wire hawser which snaked off the *Tampico*'s fore-deck bit a string of sparks from the fair-leads.

The cyclone was upon them before the winch had heaved the wire rope through the taffrail, and it opened with a squall of hail, which bent on the working men like musketry. The winch ran out, but the hauling-rope slipped over the drum, because

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the men who were handing in the slack were driven from their work by missiles large as pigeons' eggs. The hail, however, lasted less than thirty seconds. A blast of wind followed, solid as the end of a house, and the two steamers were driven before it, lifting like empty bladders. The *Tampico*'s life-boat went as an *avant-coureur*. A lightning splash showed her with oars blown away and crew looking dazed and helpless. She was scudding from crest to crest like a handful of gray spin-drift, and in what corner of the Caribbean Sea she buried her men they alone can tell. The *Paraguay*'s winch rattled irreverently on, and brought the wire hawser up to the bollards. There it was made fast to well-backed spans of ten-inch coir, and word was passed to the bridge.

"Time enough, too," said Morgan. "We've run it close," and rang on his engines, first to "half," and then, after a minute, to "full ahead."

He emphasized this last order by ringing them twice more, and then took over the steam steering-wheel from the quartermaster. That was the place where nerve was required. If the steamer deviated one hand's breadth from the right course, and got stopped by a sea which did not equally impede her tow, it would be entirely useless to scuffle about other details. The *Tampico* would swoop down on the top of her, and the pair of them would grind each

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other into their primitive plates in two handfuls of seconds.

The oily swell existed no longer now. The wind plucked the tops of the waves bodily away and churned them into foaming yeast. Even this could not well be seen. The air was full of scurrying spin-drift, which stung the face like nettles. To run before the cyclone was another name for *hari-kari*. So Captain Morgan took his steamer in a large and wallowing circle till the wind hit her squarely on the bows, and the *Tampico*, like a wet black bottle, followed after, tugging viciously at her tail. In the process she tried very hard to turn her keel uppermost several times, and rarely showed more of herself than a couple of masts and a funnel and the weather dodger of the bridge bristling through the spray. And when at last she flung herself clear with a four-foot list to starboard, the foretopmast was gone with all the yards, and the starboard bulwark of the lower fore-deck had ceased to exist. Captain Morgan spat the water out of his mouth and thought complacently of what the *Tampico*'s passengers would subscribe on the strength of it.

The second mate came up and bawled in his ear: "It's playing old boots with the rotten beast. The bollards are drawing as if they were steeped in putty, and the after-winches are clean adrift. That hawser

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is having it all its own way. There's no giving in wire."

"Then back it with more hemp," the captain shouted. "Rouse out that new coil of five-inch, pass it double round either side of the fiddley, slap over the bridge-deck, and make fast round the coamings of the fore-hatch. Then bend that on. That'll relieve her."

Llewellen went about his work, and the captain steered the steamer against the charging seas. With the engines grinding at full speed, he calculated she was making about five knots of sternway. Down the line of the cyclone was a string of sandy keys some twenty miles off which she could not by any possibility avoid if the wind took her there with the *Tampico* in her train. Alone she could keep clear; could remain about stationary; but Morgan had no intention of casting off his tow. Only he would have liked amazingly that the passengers behind him should know about those keys, though he was sure that Captain Vaughan would make no remarks on the subject. When he thought of this, he felt that he was being defrauded of many sovereigns sterling.

The *Paraguay* took it into her head to fall off to port, and even with the helm hard a-starboard could scarcely be persuaded to look up to it again. In this position she picked up another sea, which did its best to clear the upper bridge, and left the

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lower fore-deck scoured to the bare iron. The port bulwarks were gone, the cargo derricks had vanished, and the tarpaulins were ripped most tidily away from the hatch. The list changed over from starboard to port, and increased by a foot.

Llewellen splashed his way up on to the bridge again and reported: "There's another of those damned bollards drawn, and the tow-rope's over the port quarter. That's what's pulling her round. It's whipped two men overboard and broke the mate's arm. The rest of us say it's time we cast the other steamer off. They'll never know, if they do get in anywhere to report. They'll think the rope parted of itself."

Said Morgan: "Now look here. This is the one chance of my life, and I shall never get another. The moment that tow-rope parts I'll let her fall off. Look down there at that fore-hatch! The tarpaulin's gone already. If she was in the trough and the seas got a good lick at her she'd founder inside four minutes. Now you tumble aft, sonny, and get to work. You take it from me, we're either going to pluck that boat into Port Royal, or stay here and go to the devil with her."

Day broke, and the captain did a sum in his head. The line of keys, he reckoned, was only seven miles off, and the hurricane was blowing as hard as ever. Moreover, it showed no signs of easing. It was a

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case of touch and go with them, and the betting was on "go." He wished vastly that the *Tampico*'s passengers could know this with clearness, so that they might have the best opportunity of making pecuniary vows suitable to the danger—always supposing that the chance was to be offered them for handing the hat around during this present cycle.

It would be all settled one way or another within an hour and a half, and Morgan was glad. In actual hours, the time he had been laboring on the *Paraguay*'s upper bridge was short; in feel, it was half a life-span. The unspeakable fury of the wind had beat the man till he was one continuous bruise from head to foot. He had not a muscle in his body that was not wrung. The licking fingers of the cyclone had stripped the light cotton clothes off him rag by rag, till he straddled there on the wheel-grating mother-naked.

Again another mighty roller surged down from the north-east, and the sheering *Tampico* astern did her work. The *Paraguay*'s bows fell off two points to port at the critical second to the pluck of the tow-rope, and the great hill of water hit her slantwise on the flank. She lay down under it sodden and sullen, and every man on board thought she was down for good. But slowly she shook herself free, though this time with both port boats gone, and the heavy iron davits bent up like pin-wire.

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Her funnel also was over the side, sheared off from the top of the fiddley as though it had been a wax candle.

The second mate swung himself up on to the bridge again with blood trickling from a great cut on his cheek. "Captain," he shouted, "it's murdering the lot of us to go on. There's another hand over the side with that last wave, and we could do nothing for him, poor wretch!"

"It's hold on all yet, my son," Morgan bawled back, "and in five minutes you'll be thanking me. Old Nick's been blowing too hard to last. He'll be out of wind in a little, you'll see. Now tumble aft again, and watch that tow-rope doesn't part."

One more furious squall drove down, which lifted great masses of the seas bodily into the air and almost beat the captain from his perch, and then there was a lull. And then, before they had spit the last deluge from their lips, the wind was gone. The sea ran to perilous height, but there was hardly a breath to freckle it. The cyclone had passed away astern to work its evil in another place. They were free of their awful danger almost as suddenly as it had swooped down upon them.

Captain Morgan surrendered the wheel, and took clothes and his sextant. Fifteen minutes later he had given a course to the quartermaster and was looking complacently, first at his own battered tramp,

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and then at the knots of white-faced passengers who were staring at her from the liner's bridge-deck. "But," he said to Llewellen, who was at his elbow, "I must contrive to have a talk to those beauties before we have the stink of the Kingston sewers coming in through the cabin windows."

It was probably from this motive that the *Paraguay* came to a halt next day, so that the engineer might execute some repairs to her machinery. As the stay promised to occupy some six or seven hours, Captain Morgan saw fit to occupy the time with a polite call. He was rowed over to the *Tampico* with three prodigiously unclean sailors in his only remaining boat, and was received on board with tears and cheers, and every kind of honor. The tiffin bell had just rung, and he went below and sat at Vaughan's right, near the end of the middle table. Ice tinkled in the champagne-glasses, and the liner's skipper, spruce and aggressive, dryly proposed a toast. It was drunk with the wildest enthusiasm, and the bearded shabby man rose to respond.

He was no orator, but it was the supreme moment of his life, and he rose to it. He had fought for money, risked his ship and his life for money, and now he wanted to make sure of his pay. He guessed that Vaughan had tried to belittle the danger for the sake of the passengers' nerves. For these vis-

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ionary fibres he cared not one jot, but he cared a deal for a slatternly wife and some unkempt children in a grimy Welsh seaport town, and for them he lifted up his voice. He did not brag about himself, he only spoke of the *Tampico's* danger; and that was a theme on which a man could use all his lurid adjectives. He was not long on his legs, but he made those passengers white with the knowledge of how bitterly Death had fought to grapple them; and the polite man in the smart gold lace next him simmered with unspoken profanity as he listened. It was all true, baldly true, but the etiquette of shipmasters demands that narrow shaves like these shall never be published. Actual disasters make ordinary passengers quite nervous enough.

He said his say with clumsy eloquence, and went back to his battered wreck of a steamer, and stood watch and watch with the second mate all the way across the Caribbean Sea. It took the *Paraguay* eight days before she rounded the point where ruined Port Royal stands, and got amongst the odors of the harbor; and during this time the smoke from her furnaces gullied out of the fiddley-top and rolled in greasy layers upon the after-deck. But when the white streets of Kingston opened out below the tropical greenery, and the steel towing-hawser was cast off, and the two anchors sent up a bubble from Port Royal mud, then Captain Owen Morgan, in humble

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bravery of attire, reboarded the *Tampico* for the second time.

There was a lot of speech-making, and then a presentation. First came a long address with a wondrous tag of signatures, for which the worthy skipper cared as much as most men do. And then there was handed him "a more substantial testimonial of our esteem" in the form of £700 British currency, which was very much more to his taste.

It was two years before he fingered the £1,200 which the courts awarded as his share of the *Tampico's* salvage; but he made the most of it all, and Mrs. Morgan now wears black satin and beads, with a yellow watch-chain of price festooned upon her ample bosom, and Miss Morgan is "getting a good connection in the millinery," and Master Morgan is the pride of his father's heart as a pale young Methodist minister.

Being in his confidence, I can state that Captain Morgan is quite ready to put his life in the dice-box again on the chance of such another *coup* as the *Tampico* gave him. But I am afraid he is not likely to get it. Also I fear that he will be drowned before long. They coopered up the *Paraguay* again, clapped a new funnel in her, sent up an ugly stump foretopmast nine feet long, and gave her a most gorgeous coat of paint. The British Board of Trade surveyor would not, however, pass her in spite of all

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this outlay. He drank the owner's excellent champagne, several bottles of it, and still he shook his head. He was a most unreasonable man. And consequently the *Paraguay* runs under a Norwegian charter, and makes a most alarming noise of herself when she happens to be in a sea-way. Captain Owen Morgan is a most efficient nurse—but—I fear he will drown one of these days. But perhaps this is only a just fate for a sour, grimy, sordid fellow who saved a liner-load of people just because he wanted to make money. Another man with higher motives would have thought more of his own crew, and have let the tow-rope carry away—by accident.

# **The Ramming of the “Tom and Emily.”**



## The Ramming of the “Tom and Emily.”

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It may be stated roundly, and without fear of contradiction, that if Emily Cornthrop's career had been cut short in the days of her youth by measles, or whooping-cough, or any other convenient complaint, it would have been a remarkably good thing for many people who were afterwards concerned in her vagaries. If even the kindly hand of small-pox had marred her beauty, it is probable that many things would not have been written.

But as matters were, she grew up a remarkably comely young woman, well-curved, and well-built in form, and generously endowed with all that goes for beauty in face and hair. Being one of a family of nine, with a male parent who was a fish salesman on the Grimsby pontoon, when the Board School had done with her, it was decreed that she should set

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about earning her own food and dress, and to this end she entered service behind the counter of a stationer's shop in her own native town of Grimsby.

Now if you are a good-looking girl and fond of amusement, there is nothing like being engaged, and the excellent Emily did this in the year of her age, nineteen, to one Thomas Craik, then mate of the steam trawler *Kopje*. The *Kopje* had a private fishing-ground of her own where soles and halibut abounded, and the Danish gunboat (which was supposed to patrol the bank and keep off British poachers) never showed so much as her smoke. The *Kopje* had a clever skipper who never made mistakes, and she ran in and out of Grimsby harbor with the regularity of a railway train. She would pull out on (say) Monday morning at tide-time, full of ice, and steam in to the fish dock again and find a berth on the Thursday week without fail. Ten days always saw her loaded, and weather in the North Sea never hampered her movements. It was said by the envious that she knew of two fishing banks up in the Faroes, one to westward, one towards the east, and so when there was a breeze she was always able to put down her mischievous otter trawl under a lee.

As the crew got paid on shares, Thomas Craik, as mate, often drew as much as ten pounds for the trip; and so it will easily be seen how most times they met,

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he was able to give Emily presents worth two or three sovereigns apiece, and could always stand her theatres, and trips to Hull, and other such luxuries galore.

Indeed so highly did Miss Emily Cornthrop appreciate the beauty of being engaged to such a man as Tom Craik, that she paid him the high compliment of engaging herself a second time over to another man with qualities so nearly like Tom's that there was very little to choose between them. Clausen, who was thus honored by being number two, was also a rising young fisherman, and was likewise mate of a steam trawler. His skipper also had got a soft bank somewhere up the Faroes way, and they flattered themselves that they made their voyages on scheduled time like the Atlantic liners.

There were other aspirants to the post, because Emily was a fine good-looking girl, full of humor, and had no lack of admirers, but the great reason why she chose Clausen was because his trawler sailed five days after the *Kopje*, and came into port a corresponding time behind her. As has been stated, both boats made a point of entering and leaving the fish dock as accurately to time as tides would permit, and Emily Cornthrop found deep comfort in their punctuality. At the same time she was a young woman with a fine vein of caution—the post-office-stationery business instills this—and took no super-

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fluous chances. She said she was too young to be engaged; that both her parents and her employers would object to an engagement; and that therefore the understanding between them must be a sweet secret. She lingered lovingly on the sweetness of it—both with Clausen and with Tom Craik.

She certainly did give to each of them a copy of her photograph, suitably inscribed, but as these were to be carried in concealment, no peril threatened from so small a piece of attention. And so a couple of years passed very pleasantly for all concerned, and both Clausen and Tom Craik confidently expected elevation from a bunk in a trawler's living cabin, to the stuffy privacy of a trawler skipper's "room."

Observe now the impishness of fate, and indirectly the finger of a Danish Minister of Fisheries. The *Kopje* could steam twelve-point-seven and Clausen's boat just a fraction under thirteen, and by keeping a smart lookout when any of the slow moving old fisheries-protection tubs hove in sight, they could always leisurely fish their trawls, and clear. But petitions even from the Faroe Islanders to Copenhagen, if sent in with sufficient frequency reach the mark at last, and one fine winter day an apparition hove up over the saucer-lip of the horizon, which promised trouble to all future poachers of those particular fish preserves.

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She was an ugly brute of a torpedo gunboat, which could froth along at fifteen knots, and incidentally of course could in the space of three minutes blow to plates and steam any trawler that swam in the North Sea if so be her temper ran that way. She sweltered up, burning a great deal of bad coal, and flaunting out a great many peremptory signal flags, and when the trawlers cut adrift their gear and tried to steam away to sea, she opened a ricochetting fire on them with a long and extremely accurate gun, which threw up decorative fountains of seawater and spray.

No one was hit, because the skipper rightly understood that this was not a life-and-death matter, and that outraged justice would be pacified with a fine. So with a good deal of profanity they hove-to, looked upon their £300 catches of fish as good as confiscated already, dropped overboard their gear so as to give the enemy pain, and also in the hopes of weighing it in private some other day, and waited till a very triumphant Danish officer came aboard and assured them in the most polished English that they were prisoners. Thereafter to the number of six vessels they were conducted to an anchorage in Thorshavn, and masters, mates, and engineers were locked up ashore as a matter of ordinary precaution.

Courts of Justice are not held with any startling frequency in the Faroe Islands, and the islanders did not see fit to bestir themselves out of the ordi-

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nary routine for the sake of a pack of British poachers, whom naturally they wished to suffer the maximum of inconvenience. The fish banks are the principal assets of the Faroe islanders, and they have a most extraordinarily selfish dislike for aliens who come in fast steam vessels and skim up most of the fish with their murderous otter trawls, and scrape the backs off those that are left.

The mariners in the Thorshavn jail were all quite agreed about this selfishness; they were agreed also that Great Britain ought either to annex the Faroes, or send a warship to eat up the new Danish torpedo-gunboat; but having settled these, and other like points of international policy inside the first dozen hours, they began to find time hang heavily. As an obvious relief, they commenced to discuss topics of interest connected with Grimsby, which was an industry which did not call for any great display of imagination, and someone in an unlucky moment started to chaff Clausen over his conquest of Miss Emily Cornthrop.

Tom Craik pricked up his ears, but for awhile said nothing. Emily had told him not to be jealous if he heard of her as walking out occasionally with other fellows. She said it was necessary to the secrecy of their engagement. She said that if she stayed sulkily aloof from the other boys, it would look curious. She further bade him, if he ever felt

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the slightest pang of jealousy, to take out her photograph from his pocket, and read what she had written on it, and ask himself if any girl could be otherwise than true who looked upon him with such an ardent eye of affection. So up to a certain point Tom let Clausen talk on, and laid low, and said nothing.

But when certain limits are passed in the discussion of his ladylove, no engaged man who respects himself can sit still any longer; and when at last, in reply to chaff about as delicate as the blows of a handspike, Clausen owned up that he did take the lady to the theatre on a certain night, and he did escort her to Cleethorpes, and he did kiss her warmly, and many times over, on each several occasion, why then Tom flung a stool at his friend's head by way of preface, and then called him something in addition to a liar.

Clausen for a wonder kept his temper, and proceeded to justify himself. "Well, matey," he said, "you may think I've been making more free with the lass than I ought; but it's all right. We intended to keep it quiet for a bit yet, but as it's sort of forced from me here, just to show it's all right, I must ask you to let it go no further, and to keep mum when we get back to Grimsby. I've held a master's ticket for a year now, and we're to be wed when I can get a boat of my own."

"You dashed liar," shouted Tom.

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In that society a challenge need not be very plainly put before it is taken up, and all the other fishermen looked to being the spectators of a very interesting fight. But even yet Clausen did not break into blows or violent language. Instead he unbuttoned his smacksman's leather waistcoat, and took out from the breast pocket of his shirt an oil-skin case. From this, after some unlacing, he presently produced a photograph, most affectionately inscribed, and in fact the very counterpart of the one just then concealed about the person of Mr. Thomas Craik.

Now Tom in that moment had a very tolerable idea of the way in which matters lay; but he did not make a disclosure on his own part, and follow it up by a proposal that they should both of them tear the faithless one from their hearts. Nothing of the kind. He intended to have Emily Cornthrop for himself, and as a preliminary, by a sudden snatch he possessed himself of Clausen's photograph, and then ripped it into tatters. The subsequent fight was keen enough to satisfy even the most critical of the on-lookers.

They were separated before they had fought to a finish, by armed sentries, who knew nothing about the needs of the matter, and beat them impartially upon the head with gun butts in a most unsportsmanlike manner; and although Clausen, who recovered his senses first, endeavored to brain Tom

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Craik that night with the edge of a three-legged stool, it was felt that this was not quite playing the game, and so he was pulled off before much damage was done; though everybody quite understood the matter was purely and simply a personal one.

When Tom came around again, they had another set-to, but again the unsympathetic sentries put in their spoke, and this time took Clausen away to hospital where he remained till the trial. Thereafter, having been duly fined and admonished, the entire crews of them were put back on to their boats, and steamed out of Thorshavn without either catch or gear. They were not in the least penitent, and had every intention of coming back to poach the Faroe banks on the first possible occasion; but as they were stripped clean, it was necessary to go back and refit before any of them could shoot another trawl. So away they steamed for Grimsby on their most economical coal consumption. At least four of them did. The other two, the *Kopje* and Clausen's boat, gradually pulled ahead, and the other skippers winked and pointed out the black pillars of smoke that came from these racers' funnels, and wondered whether two mates had fired their captains with their own enthusiasm, or whether they were paying for the extra coal themselves.

They were both speedy vessels—all steam trawlers have a good turn of pace in these days of competi-

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tion and markets to catch—but the *Kopje* had got an engineer who knew her by heart, and when it came to the push, he squeezed out nearly three-quarters of a knot better than the other fellow. He did it partly with an eye to the future. Engineers of trawlers like to have their authentic anecdote to enlarge upon as much as other people.

Tom's skipper entered into the spirit of the thing. He pointed out that Clausen's skipper, finding himself beaten at sea, would probably drop Clausen ashore at Wick, and bid him take train and so win the race home that way. Accordingly he ran the *Kopje* in towards Aberdeen, launched the boat, and sculled Tom to one of the granite pierheads with his own fair hands, and continued his voyage Grimsby-wards with many encouraging whistle-toots. Tom boarded the train at Aberdeen, and got down to Grimsby first.

He sought his sweetheart and put matters before her with some plainness, but with no upbraiding. He said, "There seems to have been some misunderstanding, my lass, but we'll put things straight without further waiting. We'll not trouble to hang on like this till I get my master's ticket into a master's berth. You're of age, aren't you?"

"Twenty-one last month, Tom."

"Very well, dear. Then we'll get one of those expensive special license things and be married to-

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morrow, or as soon as it can be done. You'll have to do without wedding presents, and you'll have to put up with lodgings till I can rent a house and buy some furniture."

"But people will talk if we hurry so, Tom. Why can't you be more patient?"

"My lass, I have been patient; more patient than I have told you exactly. But here stands an end to my patience. There's a fellow called Clausen I have in mind. D'ye know what I should do if I saw you married to Clausen?"

She shivered a little. "No, Tom." He noted that she was looking more than usually pretty just then.

"I should shoot you, Emily, dear, and then shoot him. I'd a bit of time to wait for the train in Aberdeen, and bought a revolver there. Care to see it?"

It was typical of her that she liked him none the less for his quiet violence. She said, "I'll marry you, Tom, as soon as ever you can get the papers to say we may. I've been very silly with Mr. Clausen. Go you and get the papers now, and I'll consider what I can do for a frock. To think that I should ever come to being married in what I've got, and no time to get a proper dress!"

In this manner then the pair of them were joined in wedlock, and Clausen now and again glared at them from Grimsby street corners. Emily said he

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had got over his foolishness, but Tom had his doubts on the point, and kept his weather eye lifting for squalls. He felt that under the circumstances he would have contrived to wipe out Clausen somehow, even if he had been forced to pistol him in the public street; and somewhat rightly conceived that Clausen was waiting to do the like by him. However, thanks to his watchfulness, nothing happened, and after six months or so he ceased to carry in his pocket the life-preserved with which he was going to get in first whack at Clausen if that person attacked him in any way openly.

Moreover his financial position had improved. He had got a little money together, and had borrowed more, and by the help of a mortgage had managed to purchase an elderly steam trawler then on the market. With a burst of enthusiasm he had rechristened her the *Tom and Emily*.

It was with somewhat of envy that he noted that simultaneously Clausen, vice the late skipper washed overboard, got command of the *Kopje*, a distinctly finer boat, and he knew full well that Clausen's hate had grown none the thinner for being bottled up, and that he would square up accounts with interest if ever an opportunity arose. But he solaced himself with the thought that for better or worse, he had got Emily, and put to sea with the intention of drowning Clausen for mere safety's sake, if the occasion

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came within his reach. He was not frightened of Clausen in the least, but he recognized the bitter strength of his enmity, and told himself that he would be a fool not to take the necessary precautions.

Tom Craik was ready to take his risks anyway. If coal had been cheap he might have afforded to fish the Dogger, or one of the other more or less fished-out banks; but coal was dear just then, and if the trawler was to pay good dividends, there was nothing for it but to risk the pestilential Danish protection cruisers, and fish the Faroes. So North he steamed with a fair wind and all canvas set, and taught his new-hand cook how to fry onions so as to get the maximum of flavor for a given outlay of fruit.

Off one of the voes he knew right well, he shot his trawl, and at intervals began to haul up wealth-galore in the shape of soles and turbot, which bear the relations of sovereigns to shillings as compared to the other fish which come to market; and as these went down the hatch to find an abiding place amongst the crushed ice in his hold, he pictured to himself fifty per cent. dividends, and the trawler very shortly his own property. And so this most prosperous gleaning inside the three-mile limit continued for a night and day, and the cruisers ceased from troubling and soon (Tom told himself), the weary fishermen might be at rest and steaming home.

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But with dusk came another Grimsby man out of the next voe, which, as she loomed nearer through the gloom, Tom recognized as the *Kopje*. With a foreboding of trouble he fished his trawl, and called down the voice-tube to the engine room for full steam. To test things a little, he star-boarded his helm, as though he were going to stand away from the coast for another cast. Faithfully the *Kopje* followed him.

He left the wheel to the third hand, and ran below to his room, and got a revolver—the one he had bought in Aberdeen. He had never fired the thing, and presently regretted the lack of practice. The *Kopje* came on, grimly followed him, and Tom, knowing that at her best the elderly *Tom and Emily* had got two knots less speed, did not strain his engines or his pride by any violent attempt at escape.

The *Kopje* was aiming squarely at his side. Only one man was visible on her decks, and that was Clausen; and he stood in the little wooden pulpit on the bridge, where the wheel was, steering himself.

Tom kept his own trawler under good command, and when the other was on the point of ramming him, swung her sharply so as to take the blow of the *Kopje*’s stem slanting-wise. As the other boat rasped along his side, Tom felt the wheel, and with the best aim he could muster, pulled off every

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shot in the revolver in the direction of Clausen. He heard that person laugh annoyingly as he steamed away, and so concluded that he had missed him entirely—which was on the whole not to be wondered at.

Night fell then on the ugly scene, black and cloudless, and on both trawlers every crumb of light was hidden by careful tarpaulins. But in the dark they could hear the grind of one another's engines, and each searched to give the other a blow which would be a quietus. Between the bridges words had passed. Clausen had said, "You beggar, I'll get her yet," and forthwith Tom had become as anxious to ram as beforehand he had been keen to avoid ramming.

So, as I say, the pair of them played a ghastly kind of blind man's buff up there in the blackness on that bleak northern sea; and the crews of each trawler, with the true feudal spirit, did all in their power to assist their own particular skipper's vengeance.

How in the end the crash came, I have never been able precisely to discover. A rain squall had blown down upon them, blotting the darkness even more into invisibility. In the middle of this the vessels smashed into one another, and lay there in a horrible tangle, churning and grinding in the sea way. The crews, frightened and sobered, got their boats into the water, and rowed away for the Faroe land. But neither of them brought Clausen or Tom

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Craik. They said that neither skipper could be found.

On shore in Grimsby for one year there was a widowed Mrs. Thomas Craik, and then she married again. The man who told me this yarn says that at times, when she is too much inclined to make eyes at other men, her husband uses his belt at her, and I naturally said it was extremely wrong of him.

But on the whole I do not think I am very sorry that this new husband has such unpleasant habits. Poor old Tom Craik was a shipmate of mine for two cruises, and I liked him vastly. And Clausen also was not half a bad sort if he had been left alone. Whatever is in store for the beautiful Emily hereafter, she deserves a bad time here on this imperfect earth where she is quite able to appreciate it.









